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OR

DISCOURSES

(PRINCIPALLY IN THE FORM OF SKELETONS)

NOW FIRST DIGESTED INTO ONE CONTINUED SERIES,

AND FORMING A COMMENTARY

UPON EVERY BOOK OF

THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT;

TO WHICH IS ANNEXED,

AN IMPROVED EDITION OF A TRANSLATION OF

CLAUDE'S ESSAY ON THE COMPOSITION OF A SERMON.

IN TWENTY-ONE VOLUMES.

✓
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VOL. XVIII.

PHILIPPIANS TO 1 TIMOTHY.

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PHILIPPIANS.

MMCXXXV.

A WORK OF GRACE.

Phil. i. 6. *Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*

THERE is a just mixture of hope and fear, which every Christian should cherish in contemplating his own experience, and the state of the Church of Christ. On the one hand there certainly is ground for fear, whether we judge from analogy, or from what we behold with our eyes. What multitudes of blossoms are annually cut off by frost! of those that set, how many are blighted by an eastern wind! of those that grow, how many are blown off by storms and tempests! and of those that hang upon the tree, how many, when gathered, prove rotten at the core! Thus it is seen in the religious world; many make a fair show for a little while, and then fall off from their profession: others are blighted, and come to naught: others look well for a season, but are beaten down by storms of persecution and temptation: and of those who maintain their profession to the end, how many will at last be found unsound at heart! But, if this cast a damp upon our joys, and teach us to moderate our expectations, it need not, it ought not, to rob us of all our confidence: for though sound fruit may be blown off from a tree, no sound Christian shall ever

be separated from the Lord Jesus. Of this the Apostle was fully persuaded: and, under this conviction, he thanked God for the converts at Philippi, whose sincerity he had no reason to doubt, and of whose perseverance in the divine life he therefore entertained the most sanguine hopes.

To make a just improvement of his declaration before us, we shall shew,

I. When a good work may be said to be begun in us—

It is not an easy matter to draw the line between those high attainments of religion of which we may fall short, and yet be confident that a good work is begun; and those low attainments, which will warrant us to *hope* well, at the same time that they are by no means a sufficient ground of *confidence*. But, taking St. Paul for our guide, we trust, that we shall so discriminate, as neither to make sad the heart of the righteous, nor to countenance the delusions of the wicked. Those evidences, from whence he “*knew* the election” (and, of consequence, the perseverance also) of the saints at Thessalonica, will serve as a sure criterion whereby to judge of our own state^a. We may be assured then that a good work is begun in us, when faith, hope, and love, shew themselves to have been formed in our hearts; that is,

1. When our faith is operative—

[That faith, which is without works, is dead; and is of no more value than the faith of devils^b: but the faith which stimulates us to resist and mortify all sin, and to be conscientious in the practice of all duties, is, beyond a doubt, the gift of God, the workmanship of an almighty Agent^c.]

2. When our love is laborious—

[Our “love is not to be in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth:” nor must it have respect to men’s bodies merely, but to their souls; leading us to consult their spiritual welfare to the utmost of our power, at the same time that we gladly deny ourselves to relieve their spiritual wants. The voice of inspiration assures us that he who exercises such love is born of God^d.]

^a 1 Thess. i. 3—5.

^b Jam. ii. 19, 20.

^c Phil. i. 29. Eph. i. 19.

^d 1 John iv. 7.

3. When our hope is patient—

[The Christian's hope will have much to try it; but it is to be the anchor of his soul, that shall keep him steadfast^e in this tempestuous world. He will often experience "fightings without, and fears within:" but beyond and "against hope, he must believe in hope^f," saying, "I know in whom I have believed, and that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day^g." And every one who has such a lively hope, may be sure that he has been begotten to it by God himself^h.]

To enter fully into the Apostle's assertion, we must shew,

II. On what grounds we may be confident that he who has begun this good work will finish it—

If this work were wrought by *man*, the Apostle would never express such confidence respecting his completion of it; since no dependence can be placed on the stability of man's virtue. But since he that accomplishes this great work is *God*ⁱ, we may be assured, that "he will perform it till the day of Jesus Christ."

We may be assured of it—

1. From the declarations of his word—

[Numberless are his declarations to this effect, that having once been the "author of a good work within us, he will be the finisher of it^k." "He will not forsake his people, because it hath pleased him to make them his people^l." He has promised in the strongest possible manner, that "he will never never leave them, never never forsake them^m." True, they have many enemies: but "he will suffer none of them to pluck them out of his handsⁿ." Have they manifold temptations? They shall "have none without a way to escape, that they may be able to bear them^o." Not even their unbelief shall prevent Jehovah from executing his gracious purposes towards them^p. As for "Satan, he shall be bruised under their feet shortly^q." Through weakness they may occasionally fall: "yet shall they not be utterly cast down^r." "God will restore their souls^s:" and make their very falls the means of augmenting their future caution

^e Heb. vi. 19.

^f Rom. iv. 18.

^g 2 Tim. i. 12.

^h 1 Pet. i. 3.

ⁱ ver. 3—5. and 2 Cor. v. 5. and John i. 13.

^k Heb. xii. 2.

^l 1 Sam. xii. 22.

^m Heb. xiii. 5, 6.

ⁿ John x. 28, 29.

^o 1 Cor. x. 13.

^p 2 Tim. ii. 12, 13.

^q Rom. xvi. 20.

^r Ps. xxxvii. 23, 24.

^s Ps. xxiii. 3.

and stability^t. The sun may occasionally be covered with a cloud; yet shall it advance to its meridian height: and such shall be the path of all the servants of God^u: “they shall hold on their way, and their hands shall wax stronger and stronger^x.” This is the portion of them all without exception, for “it is not the will of our Father that one of his little ones should perish^y.”]

2. From the perfections of his nature—

[In speaking on this subject, we would proceed with great caution; for we know not what will consist with his perfections: and, if we should presume to speak dogmatically respecting them, we should only betray our own weakness and folly. Yet methinks *his wisdom* affords us some ground of confidence: for, if he has created us anew, in order that we may shew forth the power of his grace, will he suffer his enemies so to counteract his purposes as to make us only occasions of greater dishonour to him? If only *a man* should begin to construct a house and leave it unfinished, he would only expose himself thereby to a greater measure of derision^z: how then would Satan cast reflections on *the Deity*, if *he* should fail in accomplishing so great a work as man's salvation!

In like manner *the goodness* of God is some ground of hope and confidence. For God has surely never accomplished in us so good a work in order to leave us ultimately to perish under a more aggravated condemnation.

But in speaking of such things which infinitely exceed our comprehension, I can lay no stress on the conjectures of man; nor can I give weight to any thing that does not proceed clearly and immediately from God himself. But in speaking of *the truth* of God, I feel that I stand on firm ground. God has entered into covenant with us; and has confirmed that covenant with an oath: and has expressly declared that he did so confirm it, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation who “have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us^a.” He is as unchangeable in his word as he is in his nature; and “because he changeth not, therefore we are not consumed^b.” We, alas! are variable in the extreme; but “with him is no variableness neither shadow of turning^c.” Now if we look into his covenant we shall see that he gives all, and we receive all^d: and that he engages, not only “not to depart from us, but to put his fear in our hearts that we may not depart from

^t Compare Luke xxii. 31—34. with 1 Pet. v. 8.

^u Prov. iv. 18.

^x Job xvii. 9.

^y Matt. xviii. 14.

^z Luke xiv. 28, 29.

^a Heb. vi. 17, 18.

^b Mal. iii. 6.

^c Jam. i. 17.

^d Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.

him^e." We may be sure therefore that he will not cast off his people, because it hath pleased him to make them his people^f. If indeed he had chosen any of us because we *were* holy, or because he foresaw that we *should be* holy, he might abandon us as not answering his expectations. But he chose us *that we might be* holy^g, and predestinated us *to be conformed* to the image of his Son^h: and therefore what he has undertaken we may be sure he will performⁱ. It is on this ground alone that we can account for St. Paul's confidence, in which every one in whom God has begun a good work is fully authorized to join.]

I beg leave now to ADD a word,

1. Of inquiry respecting the commencement of this work—

[I am fully aware that persons so blinded by self-love as *we*, are greatly in danger of forming too favourable a judgment of our state: and I must warn all of you that God will not be put off with such a feigned repentance as Ahab's, or such a partial reformation as Herod's, or such a hypocritical attachment as that of Judas. Examine then, I pray you, with all imaginable care, respecting the *quality* of your faith, and hope, and love. Is your faith operative in purifying your heart? Is your love laborious in all kind offices, not to the bodies of men only, but to their souls? And is your hope such as carries you forward through all difficulties towards the attainment of the heavenly prize? Remember, it is no outward work that is here spoken of, but a work *in* us: and a work which nothing less than Omnipotence can effect. To deceive *yourselves* in relation to it, is vain, since you cannot deceive the heart-searching God. Be careful then to try your work, of what kind it is; and be satisfied with nothing that does not evidently bear the divine stamp and character upon it.]

2. Of admonition in reference to its continuance—

[There is nothing at which I tremble more than at a hard, bold, presumptuous confidence respecting the application of this doctrine to a man's own state, whilst in his spirit and temper and conduct he shews himself to be far from the mind of Christ. In fact, wherever *such* a confidence exists, there is great reason to doubt whether a good work has ever been begun in the soul. Confidence, if truly spiritual, will be attended with humility, watchfulness, gratitude, and zeal. Look to it then, that you manifest on all occasions a deep sense of your utter unworthiness; a fear lest in any thing you grieve

^e Jer. xxxii. 40.

^f 1 Sam. xii. 22.

^g Eph. i. 4.

^h Rom. viii. 29.

ⁱ Ps. lxxxix. 30—36.

the good Spirit of your God ; an admiring and adoring sense of God's mercy to your soul ; and a determination of heart to live only to your God. This is the true way in which the good work is to go forward in the soul : and, in so walking, you will best justify your confidence to the world, and will give the best proof of the doctrine of perseverance by actually persevering : moreover, in this way you will not only enjoy the most exalted peace on earth, but will have an abundant entrance ministered unto you in due season into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.]

MMCXXXVI.

GROWTH IN GRACE.

Phil. i. 8—11. *God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ. And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment ; that ye may approve things that are excellent ; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.*

THE connexion subsisting between a pastor and his flock is set forth in the Scriptures under the most endearing images. While *they* are spoken of as his beloved children, *he* is represented as the father that begat them, and as the nursing mother who cherishes them in her bosom. Even these images seem to have been too faint to depict the tender regard which St. Paul bore towards those who had been converted by his ministry. He longed for their welfare with more than human affection. He could compare his feelings with nothing so justly as with the yearning of the Saviour's bowels over a ruined world. Nor was he actuated by partial and personal attachments : his regards were universal : they extended to every member of Christ's mystical body : yea, he could appeal to God himself, that he felt the deepest interest in the prosperity of "all," whether more or less distinguished by worldly rank or spiritual attainments. Among the various ways in which he manifests his concern for them, he was especially mindful of prayer and intercession ; and though in these benevolent

exercises he was solicitous only to approve himself to God, yet he thought it proper on many accounts to inform them of the means he used for their benefit; and to declare to them the particular things which he sought for in their behalf.

From the prayer before us, we see that he desired,

I. Their intellectual improvement—

“Love” is absolutely essential to a Christian: without that, whatever else we may possess, we are only as sounding brass or tinkling cymbals. Love is the characteristic feature of the Deity: and in this all his children resemble him. By this mark we are made known to others as the disciples of Christ: by this we ourselves also are assured, that we have passed from death unto life. In this amiable quality the Philippians “abounded.” But the Apostle wished them to abound in it “yet more and more.” He was solicitous that it should display itself in a becoming manner. He prayed therefore that their “love might yet more and more abound,”

1. In knowledge—

[Knowledge is properly the foundation of love. Whatever we fix our affections upon, we love it for some real or supposed excellence that is in it. If we are unacquainted with the qualities of any person or thing, it is not possible that we should feel any real attachment to him or it. Our love to God therefore, and to his people, should be daily nurtured and strengthened by an increasing acquaintance with them. Our views of the *Divine perfections* are, at best, but very narrow and contracted. So little are we acquainted with his *providence*, that we can only faintly guess at either the reasons or issue of his dispensations. The *mysteries of redemption* are very superficially discovered by us. What we know of *Christ* is extremely partial and defective. The nature, extent, and beauties of *holiness* are very dimly seen. The privileges and blessedness of the *Lord's people* are but little understood. Wherever we turn our eyes, we are circumscribed by very narrow limits. On every side there are heights and depths, and length and breadth, that cannot be explored. To be searching into these things is our imperative duty, our exalted privilege. If “the angels desire to look into them,” much more should we. It is by more enlarged views of them, that our love to them must be confirmed and advanced. We should

therefore labour incessantly to form a just estimate of heavenly things, and to have our affections regulated by an enlightened understanding.]

2. In a spiritual perception of the things known—

[Merely speculative knowledge is of little avail: it is only like the light of the moon, which dissipates obscurity indeed, but communicates neither heat nor strength. The knowledge which alone will augment our love, is that which produces suitable impressions on the mind; it is that which, like the sun-beam, enlivens and invigorates our whole frame. Now there is a great difference, even amongst good men, with respect to their perception of divine truths. There is, if we may use the expression, a spiritual taste, which is acquired and heightened by exercise. As, in reference to the objects of sense, there is an exquisite “judgment” attained by some, so that their eye, their ear, and their palate can discern excellencies or defects, where others, with less discriminating organs, perceive nothing particular; so is there, in reference to spiritual things, an exquisite sensibility in some persons, whereby their enjoyment of divine truth is wonderfully enhanced^a. Now this is the knowledge which we should aspire after, and in which our love should progressively abound. We should not be satisfied with that speculative knowledge which may be gained from men and books; but should seek that spiritual discernment, which nothing but the operation of the Spirit of God upon the soul can produce^b. Whatever be the particular objects of our regard, we should get a realizing sense of their excellency, and be duly impressed with their importance.]

These views and impressions the Apostle desired for them, in order to a further end^c:

II. Their moral improvement—

Love, when duly exercised, is the main-spring of all acceptable obedience. When abounding in knowledge and in *all* judgment, so as to be suitably affected with every thing, it will improve the whole of our conduct and conversation. It will make us,

1. More judicious—

[We are very apt to be misled by what is specious. Hence many embrace erroneous *principles*, or rest in delusive *experiences*, or justify an unbecoming *conduct*. Even in the

^a Heb. v. 14.

^b 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10, 12, 14.

^c εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τὰ διαφέροντα.

apostolic age, many were turned from the faith by the sophistry of false teachers : and every day presents some to our view, who are ready to admire and applaud themselves for those very things which more disinterested persons see to be their characteristic failings : yea, plain and palpable faults are not unfrequently committed by persons unconscious of acting wrong, in whose eyes the very faults they commit appear not only innocent, but praiseworthy. It is not the world only that put darkness for light ; even the godly themselves are apt to confound good and evil ; and it is no inconsiderable part of Christian wisdom to distinguish them from each other. The Apostle was anxious that his Philippian converts should form a correct judgment, and so *try the things that differed* from each other, as to be able to discern the more excellent ; just as a refiner proves his metal in the furnace, and thus ascertains its real worth^d.

But how shall this be done ? We answer, By having our love to divine things more under the influence of an enlightened and spiritual mind. We shall then have within ourselves a faculty, as it were, whereby we may discern the things submitted to it. Our views being more comprehensive, and our judgment more spiritual, we shall be able to weigh every thing in a juster balance, and to discriminate with far greater exactness. As the different senses are fitted to give us a right estimate of the things on which they are exercised, so the mind, imbued with ardent love, extensive knowledge, and spiritual discernment, will rightly appreciate whatever presents itself to its notice, and calls for its decision.]

2. More steadfast—

[Though sincerity is ever an attendant on true religion, yet is there much hypocrisy still remaining in the renewed heart. We do not mean that there is any *allowed* guile ; for that would at once determine a man to be no true Israelite : but every grace in man's heart is imperfect, and admits of growth ; and, consequently, sincerity amongst the rest. Moreover, as long as we continue in the body, we are liable to err ; and not only to stumble ourselves, but even to become stumbling-blocks to others. Not the attainments of St. Peter himself could place him beyond the reach of sin. We may appeal to all who “ know the plague of their own hearts,” whether they do not still feel within themselves a proneness to act with an undue reference to the good opinion of their fellow-creatures ; and whether they have not still reason to lament the existence of manifold defects in their deportment

^d See note c. This seems to be the precise idea contained in the Apostle's words.

towards God and man ! Now it is of infinite importance, to the honour of religion and the comfort of our own souls, that these defects be remedied as much as possible ; that we be more and more delivered from the influence of corrupt passions ; and that we be kept sincere and upright until the day of Christ.

But how shall this steadfastness be attained ? We can prescribe no better means than those referred to in the text. A loving spirit, abounding in clear, spiritual, and impressive views of divine truth, will assist us greatly in the whole of our conduct. A feeling sense of the love of Christ upon our hearts will fortify us against every temptation ; it will make our walk circumspect, our conscience tender, our zeal ardent, our obedience uniform.]

3. More diligent—

[In estimating a fruit-tree, our principle inquiry respects its fruit : its foliage and blossoms are objects comparatively unimportant. Thus the principles and professions, the experiences and habits of a Christian, are no further valuable, than as they are connected with the substantial fruits of righteousness. His love, whether to God or man, must lead to active exertions, and must shew itself in the practice of universal holiness. He should be like a tree whose boughs are laden with fruit. Such a Christian adorns his profession, and recommends religion to all who behold him : and the fruit which he bears, by virtue derived from Christ, does, through the merits of Christ, ascend up with acceptance before God ; and tends exceedingly to exalt the honour of God in the world. Such fruitfulness, I say, is the great end of all the mercies vouchsafed unto him, and of all the love which he professes to feel towards Christ and his people.

But how shall this be secured ? We can recur to nothing more effectual than that already mentioned. If we increase in a spiritual perception of the excellency and importance of the Gospel, we cannot fail of being stirred up to activity and diligence in the ways of God : we shall not be satisfied with bringing forth thirty or sixty-fold, but shall labour to bring forth fruit an hundred-fold, and to be “filled with” it in all seasons, and under all circumstances. “Give me understanding,” says David, “and I shall keep thy law, yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.”]

APPLICATION—

[While we admire the Apostle’s tender solicitude for the souls of men, let us cherish a just regard for our own souls ; and, by mutual exhortations and fervent intercessions, endeavour to the utmost to advance the interests of religion, in each other, and in the world at large.]

MMCXXXVII.

DECISION OF CHARACTER RECOMMENDED.

Phil. i. 17. *I am set for the defence of the Gospel.*

THE Gospel is a revelation of mercy to sinful man, and the most stupendous display of God's wisdom and grace that ever was given to his intelligent creation — — — It might naturally have been expected that such tidings should have been invariably welcomed with unbounded joy: but, in every age, and every place under heaven, has it excited the fiercest opposition — — — On the other hand, it has been maintained with firmness by God's faithful servants, and has triumphed over all the opposition that either men or devils could raise against it — — — In truth, it has been assailed no less by subtilty than by force; and its very doctrines have been propagated with a view to undermine its influence. St. Paul tells us, that, on his imprisonment, many rose to the occasion, and proclaimed the Gospel with augmented fortitude; but that some had preached it for no other end than that of drawing away his disciples, and thereby adding affliction to his bonds. He, however, whether under prosperous or adverse circumstances, "was set for the defence of the Gospel," and was determined to maintain it, even unto death.

In him we see,

I. What place the Gospel should hold in our estimation—

Nothing is of importance in comparison of it—

[Nothing can vie with it in *certainty as a record*, in *richness as a system*, or in *value as a remedy*.

Whatever can be conceived as necessary to establish its authority as a divine record, is found in it in such abundance, that no record under heaven can be received, if this be not. Its evidences, both external and internal, are so clear and numerous, that it is not possible for a candid mind to withstand their force — — —

And what wonders of love and mercy does it bring to our view! the substitution of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son, in

the place of his rebellious creatures, to bear the wrath which they had merited, and fulfil the law which they had broken, and thereby to work out a righteousness wherein they might find acceptance! — — — the sending also of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person in the ever-adorable Trinity, to impart to men the knowledge of this salvation, and to prepare them for the enjoyment of it! Such a mode of restoring man to his offended God infinitely surpasses all finite conception: nor will eternity suffice to explore the wonders of love and mercy contained in it — — —

To the weary and heavy-laden soul nothing else is wanting. It provides for sinful man all that his necessities require—pardon, and peace, and holiness, and glory: pardon of all his sins, how great or numerous soever they may have been; peace with God, and in his own conscience; strength for the performance of every duty; and everlasting happiness at the right hand of God. Never was there a case which this did not reach; never a want for which it was not an adequate supply — — —]

Nothing, therefore, should equal it in our esteem—

[How vain and empty does the world appear, when viewed by the eye of faith! St. Paul, speaking of the cross of Christ, says, that, “by it the world was crucified unto him, and he unto the world.” This expression of his will set this matter in its true light. Suppose a person suspended on the cross, and in the very article of death: what are the world’s feelings in relation to him, and his in reference to the world? His dearest friends and relatives feel their connexion with him altogether dissolved; and he, even if he has possessed crowns and kingdoms, feels no further interest in them; but bids them, without regret, an everlasting farewell. Precisely thus are the bonds which once subsisted between the believer and the world burst asunder; they no longer regarding him as theirs, and he no longer regarding them as his. The concerns of eternity have taken possession of his mind; and he has no longer any taste for the things of time and sense. This, I hesitate not to say, should, *in the main*, be the experience of all who embrace the Gospel: “they should count all things but dung, that they may win Christ.”

Nor should personal ease be deemed of any importance in comparison of fidelity to Christ. The fiery furnace should not intimidate: the den of lions should not deter us from the path of duty. Whatever we may have suffered, or may be threatened with, for the Gospel’s sake, we should be ready to say, with the Apostle, “None of these things move me: neither count I my life dear unto me, so that I may but fulfil my duty to my Lord and Saviour” — — —

It is scarcely needful to say, that we must be ready to relin-

quish for it our own righteousness: for though self-righteousness cleaves closer to us than to any thing else, a just view of the Gospel will dispel it all, as a morning cloud; and we shall be ready to seek our all in Christ; making him, and him alone, “our wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.”]

From hence, then, we may easily see,

II. What firmness it should produce in our conduct—

The Apostle “was set for the defence of the Gospel,” in the midst of greater difficulties and trials than ever were encountered by mortal man^a. And a similar firmness should we manifest,

1. In our adherence to it—

[It is, indeed, “our very life^b,” and should occupy our whole souls. It should be to our souls what our souls are to our bodies: it should live, and move, and act in every part. Our every act, and word, and thought, should be directed by it; and we should be as tenacious of it as of life itself. It is justly said, “Skin for skin; yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life^c,” and in this light we should view the Gospel: in comparison of it, every thing in the whole universe should be considered as of no account: and, if all the world endeavour to wrest it from us, we should be ready to lay down our life in its defence; well knowing, that “whoso will save his life, shall lose it; but that whosoever will lose it for the Gospel’s sake, the same shall save it^d.”]

2. In our profession of it—

[There were, in the Apostle’s days, some who “preached Christ of envy and strife;” and who affected an union in sentiment with him, only with a view to subvert his power. And such preachers exist at this day; adopting and proclaiming the Gospel itself, for the purpose of diminishing the influence of those whose principles are more pure, whose aims are more exalted, whose lives are more heavenly. Indeed, there is scarcely any thing more common, than for the people of the world to point out to their friends men as patterns of sound doctrine and of correct conduct, with no better view than to draw away from more zealous ministers their followers and adherents. But we should be alike on our guard against pretended friends and avowed enemies. I mean not to say that we should not listen to counsel of any kind: for certainly we ought to suspect our own judgment, and to lend a willing ear

^a 2 Cor. xi. 23—28.

^b Deut. xxxii. 47.

^c Job ii. 4.

^d Matt. xvi. 25.

to good advice; but we should guard against seduction, from whatever quarter it may come; and should “prove all things, and hold fast that only which is good.” As to concealing our love to the Gospel, we should not attempt it, or even endure the thought of it for a moment. We should not be afraid of having it known “whose we are, and whom we serve.” We should shine as lights in the world; holding forth, in our lives, as well as with our lips, the word of life:” and should so make “our light to shine before men, that all who behold it may glorify our Father who is in heaven.” It was a matter of public notoriety that the Apostle was “set for the defence of the Gospel:” nor should our devotion to it be unknown by those around us, who have an opportunity of observing our life and conversation.]

3. In our propagation of it to the world—

[This is the duty both of ministers and people; each of whom, in their respective places and stations, should advance the knowledge of it to the utmost of their power. The whole mass of converts, when driven from Jerusalem by the persecution which had consigned Stephen to martyrdom, “went every where preaching the word^e.” And, in like manner, all, of every description, though not called to the ministerial office, are, in a less ostensible manner indeed, though scarcely less effectual, to bear testimony to the truth, and to commend the Saviour to all around them^f——To “put our light under a bushel” would be the greatest injustice both to God and man: to God, who has imparted it to us for the good of others; and to man, who can by no other means be guided into the way of peace. To the pious zeal of others we are indebted for all that we know; and, “having freely received, we should freely give.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have no regard for the Gospel—

[In what a pitiable state are you! and how awfully has “the god of this world blinded your eyes!” — — — Perhaps you think that the opposition which it meets with is a just ground for questioning its real worth. But I should rather say, that that very opposition is a *presumptive* evidence in its favour; because it has been so opposed from the days of Cain and Abel until now; and because it declares what reception it shall ever meet with from an ungodly world. And may I

^e Acts viii. 4.

^f If this be preached in support of a *Bible Society*, here would be the place for shewing the importance of such societies, and men’s duty to support them.

not add, that the firmness of holy men in its support is a further testimony in its behalf? I know, indeed, that many have died in the defence of error: but where, in the annals of the world, will be found such a frame of mind as that of Stephen, except under the influence of the Holy Spirit, and in attestation to the truth of God? Let not then that Gospel, which has been so esteemed by others, be any longer slighted by you. Be careful, indeed, that you receive the true Gospel: guard against all perversions of the doctrine of Christ: see to it, that, in your view of it, the sinner is laid low, even in the dust, and that the Lord Jesus Christ alone is exalted: and, having once embraced that, let it “be all your salvation, and all your desire.”]

2. Those who, knowing the Gospel, are yet afraid to confess it—

[No sin is more severely reprobated in the Gospel, than the being ashamed of Christ^g — — — And as none is more fatal, so none is more foolish: for the very persons who hate us for the sake of Christ will honour us more, in their minds, for adhering to our principles, than for renouncing them, or acting unworthy of them. But, supposing it were not so, what is man’s displeasure, in comparison of God’s; or his favour, when compared with God’s? To all, then, I say, “Fear not man, who, when he has killed the body, hath no more that he can do: but fear Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear Him.”]

3. The sincere followers of our Lord—

[If you suffer even unto bonds, care not for it: let your only fear be, lest by any means you should dishonour the Gospel of Christ. Instead of being intimidated by opposition, let it be to you rather an occasion for manifesting your fidelity to Him, whose servant you are: and in proportion as persecution rages, let your courage rise, and your efforts be increased: and, if called to lay down life itself for him, rejoice that you are counted worthy so to do; and have no concern whatever, but that “Christ may be magnified in your body, whether by life or death.”]

^g Mark viii. 38.

MMCXXXVIII.

PREACHING OF CHRIST, A GROUND OF JOY.

Phil. i. 18. *Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.*

WHEN our blessed Lord came into the world, it was said concerning him, that he was “set for the

fall and rising again of many in Israel, that the thoughts of many hearts might be revealed^a." And certainly his Gospel has been an occasion of displaying, in a far greater degree than at any former period, the extreme wickedness of the human heart, and, at the same time, the astonishing efficacy of divine grace to renew and sanctify the soul. The virulent opposition made to the Gospel by its professed enemies may, in some measure, illustrate the former. But the subtle contrivances of its professed friends to adulterate its truths and to subvert its influence, shewed a degree of malignity perfectly Satanic: whilst the virtues which have, by these means, been drawn forth into exercise, have been no less illustrative of the power and grace of Christ. In several of the apostolic Churches, there were not only some who perverted the Gospel by a mixture of self-righteous doctrines, but some who actually preached the Gospel for the very purpose of undermining its proper influence. In the context, this curious device is fully developed, and the mask is taken from the faces of these base hypocrites; whilst the effect of their endeavours on the Apostle's mind is plainly declared.

By the Roman magistrates, St. Paul had been sent to Rome, and imprisoned. This, which seemed likely to stop the progress of the Gospel, had, in reality, turned out to the furtherance of it; because the zeal of many others was called forth, in a much greater degree, to advance its interests. But some, who sought only their own glory, took occasion, from his imprisonment, to practise on the minds of his followers, and to draw them away from him. Paul's converts, however, were too well instructed to be wrought upon by false doctrines: and, therefore, these teachers preached the true Gospel itself, that so they might insinuate themselves into the affections of their simple-minded hearers, and thus form them into a party against the Apostle himself, and ultimately establish their own authority on the ruin of his. Hear the Apostle's own account of it: "Some

^a Luke ii. 34, 35.

indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good-will; the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds; but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the Gospel. What then? notwithstanding every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice^b.”

In discoursing on these latter words, I will shew,

I. What we are to understand by preaching Christ—

This is a term frequently made use of to express the preaching of the Gospel. In the passage before us, it is repeated no less than three times; and it is admirably adapted to convey at once to the mind the whole complex idea of proclaiming, in all its parts, the great mystery of redemption. Under this term is comprehended a full exhibition of,

1. Our need of Christ—

[The fall of man, and the consequent guilt and misery of the human race, form the ground on which a Saviour is necessary. The angels, that have never fallen, need no Saviour: but, as we have fallen, and are wholly incapable of restoring ourselves either to the image or favour of God, we need one to do it for us. This, then, must be fully opened, in order to preach Christ with effect: and all our hearers must be fully informed, that they are under the wrath of God—that they can never atone for their own sins—that it is impossible for them to renew their own natures—that their hope must be altogether in God’s mercy, through Christ—]

2. Christ’s suitableness and sufficiency to save us—

[Not all the angels in heaven were competent to this task. But the Lord Jesus Christ was God equal with the Father, and therefore was capable of accomplishing what no finite power could effect. By assuming our nature, he could suffer in our place and stead; whilst his Godhead imparted to those sufferings a value, sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world. Besides, having now in himself essentially all the fulness of the Godhead, and a communicative fulness expressly treasured up in him, as our mediator, for the benefit of his Church, he can impart to every one of his members all

^b ver. 14—18.

that he sees to be needful for them in this state of trial and probation. And he has actually promised to all, who believe in him, a supply of all spiritual blessings according to their necessities. Now, this must occupy a very large share in the ministrations of those who would preach the Gospel aright. On the Godhead of Christ depends his sufficiency for the work assigned him: and on the discharge of all his offices, of Prophet, Priest, and King, depends the hope of all who trust in him. In these offices, therefore, he must be held forth to the faith of his people; that through him their minds may be enlightened, their iniquities cancelled, and their enemies subdued. In a word, a full exhibition of Christ in his mediatorial character is that which chiefly constitutes what we call the Gospel: and if we would preach it aright, we must “determine, with St. Paul, to know nothing amongst our people, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”]

3. The nature and blessedness of his salvation—

[We shall preach Christ to little purpose, if we do not hold him forth as a Saviour from sin. He had the name *Jesus* assigned to him for that express purpose, that he might be recognized by all in this particular view, as “saving his people from their sins.” To deliver them from wrath would be a small matter, if he did not also deliver them from sin: for sin, if suffered to retain dominion over them, would itself create a hell within them. I would speak it with reverence; but I should not speak too strongly, if I should say, that God himself could not make a man happy, whilst he continued under the power of his sins. There is a beauty and a felicity in holiness; a beauty, in that it assimilates a man to God’s image; and a felicity, in that it is a foretaste of heaven itself. This requires to be opened, in order to guard against a misapprehension of the Gospel salvation, as though it were nothing more than a deliverance from death and hell; and at the same time to give a right direction to every follower of Christ; and to make him aspire after holiness, as the perfection of his nature, and the completion of his bliss.]

But my text leads me to mark particularly,

II. With what different views this preaching may be maintained—

The Apostle speaks of some as preaching Christ “*in pretence*,” and of others “*in truth*.” And certain it is, that Christ is sometimes preached,

1. From unworthy motives—

[One would scarcely suppose this possible. But what has been, may be: and, as in the Apostles’ days, so now also,

Christ is sometimes preached only as the means of advancing some personal and carnal ends.

Some, alas! preach Christ *for gain*; and make the proclamation of his Gospel an office, in the discharge of which they are to obtain a livelihood. Yes, "for filthy lucre sake" do multitudes engage in this service, and not "of a ready mind:" and, if there were nothing but a bare subsistence to be gained by it, they would leave the whole world to perish, rather than go forth to enlighten and to save them. Under this head, I must rank those also who engage in the sacred office as a mere *profession* (like that of law or medicine), in which they may occupy somewhat of an ostensible post, and sustain a respectable character in the world, at the same time that they desire only to pass their days in polished ease and carnal indolence.

There are others who preach Christ *for popularity*. It is found that there is nothing which so interests the feelings of mankind, as the Gospel; and wherever that is preached with any degree of clearness and energy, there people will flock to hear it. Now, to our fallen nature, distinction of any kind is gratifying: and, if a person can see himself followed by multitudes, who hang on his lips, and express delight in his ministrations, he will feel himself repaid, quite as well as by pecuniary compensation: and that many are actuated by this kind of ambition, whilst they profess to be led on by higher motives, there is too great reason to fear. Few, indeed, would acknowledge that they were influenced by such vanity as this: but, if they would mark what inordinate satisfaction they feel in a crowded audience, and what disappointment in a thin attendance, they might see, that, to say the least, their motives are very questionable. And, indeed, this very motive often gives a tone and direction to the ministrations of men, who will gratify a particular taste, not because they judge that style of preaching to be most scriptural, but because they see it to be most accordant with the public feeling: and they dare not to enter fully into what they themselves would think most needful, lest they should give offence to their hearers, and lessen the popularity which they supremely affect. Base is this motive, which prefers the estimation of men to the real welfare of their souls.

But there are others who more exactly resemble the persons whom the Apostle describes as "preaching Christ of contention." Yes, even at this day it is no uncommon thing to preach Christ chiefly *with a view to undermine the influence* of some popular minister. Let a pious minister arise in the Established Church, and what labours will be used to draw away his people: preachings, prayer-meetings, societies, will all be formed for this very end; and persons of popular talent

be brought from a distance to further the base design. And, if a minister out of the establishment be extensively useful in converting souls to Christ, similar efforts will sometimes be made, not so much to save the souls of men, as to keep them from attending the ministry of one in another communion. I do not by this mean to say, that a minister in the establishment ought not to labour to keep his people firm to the establishment; for I conceive this to be his bounden duty, to which he has pledged himself, in his ordination vows: but to make *this* his *main* object in extending his ministrations, is to tread very close upon the heels of those who “preached Christ of envy and strife.”

But there are others, blessed be God, who preach Christ,]

2. From motives that are becoming a Christian minister—

[Yes, there are some, at least, who are like-minded with the Apostle; who know, by experience, what an evil and bitter thing it is to be under the guilt of sin, and the wrath of God. They know, too, by the same blessed experience, what it is to have found a Saviour, and to have obtained peace through his blood. And they desire to be instrumental in imparting this knowledge to their fellow men, and in bringing them to a participation of the same benefits. They feel, too, a love to that Saviour, who has so loved them, and given himself for them. They desire to make him known, and to exalt his name in the world. Gladly would they see the whole earth subjected to his dominion, and all the kingdoms of the world united under him, as their common Lord. Hence it is that they preach him with ardour and with zeal. These were the motives by which the Apostle Paul was actuated; and, through the tender mercy of God, a goodly number of ministers are raised up to tread in his steps, and to “be followers of him as he was of Christ.”]

But, whether the motive of the preacher be good or bad, we must say of the preaching,

III. That, under any circumstances, it is a ground of joy—

It is doubtless much to be regretted that any person should execute such a sacred office from unworthy motives; and over the man who does so, we would weep with the deepest sorrow. Yet, whilst we mourn over *him* as involving his own soul in perdition, we cannot but rejoice in *his act*, on account of the consequences that flow from it.

We rejoice in it,

1. Because it diffuses truth—

[Truth, under any circumstances, is better than error, even as light is better than darkness. But if truth be viewed in its consequences, its importance will be found to exceed our utmost conceptions. The preachers who proclaim not the Lord Jesus Christ, disseminate error. Whether it be in denying the fallen state of man, or in establishing man's righteousness, or in inculcating merely heathen morals, or in whatever way it is that men go beside the Gospel, or come short of it, the effect is the same: the preacher betrays the hearers to their ruin; and the people, so deceived, must "perish for lack of knowledge." Contrast, then, with such a ministry the preaching of one who exalts Christ among his people, and points him out as "the way, the truth, and the life;" and the difference between them will be found exceeding great. As to the motives and principles by which the preacher may be actuated, the hearer has nothing to do with them: he is not called to judge of them: nay, he has no right to judge of them: he must leave that matter to Him who alone can search the hearts of men: but, in the truth exhibited to his view, he has the very same interest that he would have if it were declared by an angel from heaven: his mind is enlightened by it; and his feet are guided into the way of peace. However unworthy the preacher of it may be, God may work by it; as we have no doubt he did by the ministry of Judas, as well as by the other Apostles: and, in as far as truth is diffused instead of error, "we do rejoice in it, yea, and will rejoice in it."]

2. Because the Lord Jesus Christ is exalted—

[I well know that Christ would not suffer the demoniacs to confess him. I know also, that, as far as the preachers themselves are concerned, Christ is dishonoured, rather than glorified, in those who preach him from unhallowed motives. But when he is truly preached, whatever be the motives of the minister himself, he is, on the whole, honoured; for his salvation is made known; his kingdom is enlarged; his authority is established; his name is glorified. This ought to be a matter of unfeigned joy to all. The angels, when they announced his advent to the shepherds, said, "Behold, we bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people: for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." If, then, the advent of Christ, whilst he was yet but a new-born infant, was so replete with joy to all people, much more must the full exhibition of his mediatorial work and offices be a source of joy; since in

them is the whole mystery of his love unfolded, in all its height and depth, and length and breadth.]

3. Because the souls of men are benefited—

[Men, I say again, have nothing to do with the motives of the preacher. But if they receive the truth in the love of it, they enter at once into the full liberty of the Gospel, and enjoy all the blessings of a finished salvation. Amongst the Jews, many who rejected Christ were empowered to cast out devils: and the persons dispossessed were as much liberated from the bonds of Satan as if the work had been wrought by the most distinguished Apostle. In like manner, the person who was instructed in the truth by the ministration of Judas, felt the power of the word as much as if he had received it from Peter or from John. The traveller is not less refreshed by a fountain in a desert, because he was led to it by the feet of beasts: nor are the waters of life deprived of their efficacy, because they have not been first tasted by him who puts the cup into our hands. It is the truth, and not the minister, that makes us free: it is Christ, and not the preacher, that saves the soul. Say, then, whether it be not a just ground of joy that the saving doctrines of the Gospel are proclaimed, even though it be by one who is a stranger to their power? Yes, “if Christ be preached,” by whomsoever it may be, and from whatever motive, “I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.”]

May we not, then, from hence OBSERVE,

1. How unlike to the Apostles are they who hate the preaching of Christ!

[There is no other subject in the world so odious to the ungodly as this. We may preach the *Law* as strictly as we please, and men will hear us with delight: but let us preach the *Gospel*, and men will be sure to be offended with us: and if this effect do not follow, we may be sure that we do not preach as Christ and his Apostles preached it. But what shall we say of those who thus take offence? St. Paul rejoiced in the Gospel, though so unworthily propagated from envy and strife: but these persons are grieved at it, even when delivered with the utmost sincerity and love. “They know not, alas! what spirit they are of:” but this they may know, that if they be not brought to an entire change of mind, so as to love the Gospel as the Apostle did, they can never hope to participate, with him, its joys in a better world.]

2. What cause have they for sorrow, who, though they hear the Gospel, make no suitable improvement of it!

[We are responsible for what we hear: and, if we hear of Christ, and receive him not into our hearts by faith, "it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for us." Are there any of that character here present? How would the Apostle weep over you! He tells us, that "he had great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart, on account of his unbelieving brethren:" and that is the feeling which I would cultivate in your behalf, and which I would recommend you to cherish in your own bosoms — — —]

3. How happy are they, who, whilst they have the Gospel faithfully ministered to them, experience in their souls its saving power!

[Verily, you are the blessed of the Lord. You have that in your souls which will turn every sorrow into joy. The Apostle quite forgot his own bonds, and the malignity of those who sought to add affliction to them. The honour of Christ, and the welfare of immortal souls, swallowed up all personal considerations, and filled him with ineffable delight. Let the Gospel operate in this very way on your minds. Live not below your privileges in this respect. Shew, that if men can bind the body, they cannot fetter the soul. Shew that your joys are altogether independent of them, and out of their reach. This is the way to prove what the preaching of Christ will effect; and will encourage all who behold you to live for Christ, and to suffer for his sake.]

MMCXXXIX.

CHRIST MAGNIFIED IN OUR BODY.

Phil. i. 20. *Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.*

WHILST the great mass of mankind, like a ship driven with fierce winds and tossed upon tempestuous waves, are uncertain what may be the event of their trials, the true Christian is like a ship at anchor: he beholds the storm, but defies its power: he knows that every effort, either of men or devils, to destroy him, shall issue in his own welfare, and in their confusion. St. Paul was in prison at Rome, uncertain whether he should be set at liberty or put to death. He had adversaries also amongst the professed

followers of Christ, who laboured to increase his affliction, by weakening his influence in the Church, and drawing away his converts to their own party. But he knew, that the more his afflictions abounded, the more were the prayers of God's people offered up on his behalf, and the more would a supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ be poured out upon him. He was therefore satisfied, that, however matters might terminate with respect to temporal deliverance, they would issue in his final "salvation;" and that he should be so strengthened from above, as never to "be ashamed" of his profession, but rather that, as in past times, so to the latest hour of his existence, "Christ should be magnified in his body, whether it were by life or by death."

This expression is very singular, and deserves more than ordinary attention. We propose therefore to consider,

I. *In what sense* Christ may be magnified in our body—

We may easily conceive that Christ should be *served*, or *honoured* by us; but how can he be *magnified*? Can we add any thing to his *essential dignity*? No; he is "God over all, blessed for evermore." Can we add to his *mediatorial honours*? No; we cannot augment his kingly power, or give virtue to his priestly sacrifice, or enlarge his influence as the great Prophet of the Church. Can we add to *the glory that he possesses in heaven*? No; the angels and glorified saints are already glorifying him, day and night, with all their faculties and all their powers. Surely then (it may be said) this is a proud, if not a blasphemous expression. No; we must not so hastily condemn an inspired Apostle. You ask then, How can we *magnify* Christ? We answer, that he may be magnified by us both in word and deed: "O magnify the Lord with me," says the Psalmist, "and let us exalt his name together." *This* shews what may be done by *our voices*: and as to *our actions*, we may be said to magnify him, when in our conduct we set forth,

1. The purity of his law—

[It is not only in “bearing one another’s burthens,” but in obeying all the precepts of the Gospel, that we are to “fulfil the law of Christ.” Now the extent of this law is not in any degree imagined by the world at large: they have no idea of the motives, the principles, the conduct which the Christian code inculcates. But when a child of God is enabled to act up to his profession, he shews to all around him the beauty of holiness: he commends to them the law which he obeys: he constrains them to see and acknowledge its transcendent excellence: and in advancing thus the honour of the law, he honours also the Lawgiver: “In adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour,” he adorns and magnifies the Saviour himself.]

2. The perfection of his character—

[The Christian follows the steps of his Divine Master, and endeavours to “walk as he walked.” Now if *his* path be luminous, what must that of the Lord Jesus have been? The most eminent of our fallen race was no more in comparison of him, than a twinkling star (I should rather say, a glow-worm) in comparison of the meridian sun. If therefore the effulgence of a poor and sinful creature like ourselves be such as to attract the admiration of all that behold it, much more must the splendour of Emmanuel’s holiness exceed in glory; inso-much that the attainments of Paul himself have no glory by reason of his glory that excelleth.]

3. The blessedness of his service—

[If we see a person grudging every labour that he performs, we naturally conclude that his task is irksome, and that the master whom he serves is not (in his esteem at least) worthy of any high regard. But if we behold a person straining every nerve, and exerting himself day and night in the most arduous services, and, after all, complaining only that he cannot perform one half of what he wishes to do for his master, we conclude, of course, that he loves both his work, and his master too. When therefore we behold an exemplary and laborious Christian devoting all his powers to the service of his God, and all the while taking shame to himself as an unprofitable servant, we are constrained to say, that (in his eyes at least) his Lord is worthy of all honour, and the work in which he is engaged is perfect freedom. The devotedness of the servant is a high and public commendation of his Lord.]

4. The power of his grace—

[*It is to this chiefly that the Apostle refers: and it is by a display of this that Christ is chiefly magnified. A river*

flowing with a rapid and majestic current to the sea, would defy the efforts of the whole world to turn it back again to its source; yet by the returning tide it is not only arrested in its course, but driven up again with equal rapidity towards the fountain-head. It is thus that a sinner, when rushing with the whole current of his affections towards this present world, is stopped in his career of sin, and turned back with an irresistible impulse towards high and heavenly things. Let men, yea, let all the angels in heaven, attempt to effect this change, and their united efforts would be in vain. Who then that witnesses this change, and beholds the believer's victories over sin and Satan, and his progressive advancement in the ways of holiness, must not adore that power by which so great a miracle is wrought? *In this* Christ is indeed magnified: "the exceeding greatness of his power is made known;" and the sufficiency of his grace is incontrovertibly established.]

Let us now proceed to inquire,

II. *By what means* Christ may be magnified in our body—

St. Paul knew not whether his present imprisonment would issue in life or death: but in either case he hoped and expected that Christ would be magnified in his body; that is, either by the *renewed services* of his body, or its *protracted sufferings* unto death. In order then to magnify Christ in our body, we must,

1. Use our body as an instrument to fulfil his will—

[The Apostle was a fit pattern for us. Were his feet at liberty? he travelled from Judea round about into Illyricum, that he might carry to heathen nations the glad tidings of the Gospel. Were his hands at liberty? he worked by night, that he might be able to preach by day. Was his tongue at liberty? he preached Christ incessantly, and encouraged all to put their trust in him. It is thus that we also should act. We are not indeed called to execute like him the apostolic office, and, consequently, not to tread precisely in the Apostle's steps: but we are called to walk in the same spirit, and to employ all the faculties of our body in the same manner. We should "yield all our members instruments of righteousness unto God." We should consider our eyes, our ears, and all our powers, as consecrated to him, and to be used for him. And though our sphere may be very contracted, yet may every one of us find abundant scope for the exercise of piety and benevolence, if we will only put forth the powers that we

have, and embrace the opportunities that are afforded us. Dorcas was limited in her means of doing good ; yet were her exertions so great, that the whole Church at Joppa wept and deplored her loss : and *we* also may endear ourselves to multitudes, and greatly magnify the Lord, if in our respective places we improve the talents committed to our care.]

2. Endure cheerfully whatever we may be called to suffer for his sake—

[There is a kind of suffering which we should account no suffering at all : we should “ mortify our earthly members,” and “ crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts,” and cut off the right hand, or pluck out the right eye, that is an occasion of offence to us. But there are other sufferings, which though we may deprecate, we must expect and submit to, saying, “ Not my will, but thine be done.” Reproaches, persecutions, imprisonments, and death, are, more or less, the portion of all who follow Christ. Doubtless they are not pleasing to flesh and blood : yet, as they may be the means of displaying the power and grace of Christ, we may not only bear them, but even “ take pleasure in them.” St. Paul cheerfully submitted to them in this view : “ We bear about,” says he, “ in our body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be manifest in our body^a :” and, to manifest the importance of that thought, he repeats it almost in the same words in the very next verse. Let us meet our trials in the same way ; and then, as he has told us, His strength shall be perfected in our weakness, and His name be magnified in our obedience.]

ADDRESS—

1. The self-indulging world—

[You seem to think your body made only that you might adorn, pamper, and gratify it. What resemblance then have you to the Apostle ? Till you know the true use of the body, and employ it in its only legitimate exercises, you have no pretensions to the Christian character^b.]

2. The inactive professor—

[St. Paul intimates that there is but one alternative ; you will either “ be ashamed,” or “ magnify Christ with your body :” if by any considerations you are deterred from glorifying Christ, you so far renounce all your principles, professions, and expectations : but if you value Christ as you ought, you will live and die for him. Judge which is better for yourselves, and more suitable to your obligations to him.]

^a 2 Cor. iv. 10, 11.

^b Dan. v. 23. and 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

3. The advancing Christian—

[What a noble ambition is yours^c! You are not contented to serve or enjoy Christ, but must also magnify him. Go on; and he will soon “make your vile body like unto his glorious body” in a better world: and whatever others may be, *you* shall “*not be ashamed* before him at his coming.”]

^c 2 Thess. i. 11, 12.

MMCXL.

ST. PAUL'S DILEMMA.

Phil. i. 21—24. *To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.*

THE way to ascertain the real excellence of religion, is to see what it can do for us in the hour of trial, when all other helps and comforts fail us. If it can support us then, and make us to triumph over all the feelings of nature, its power must be confessed to be exceeding great and highly beneficial. Now that it has that power, is evident from the example before us. St. Paul was in prison at Rome, confined there in order to be brought forth for execution, whenever Nero, the Roman emperor, should issue the command. Contentious teachers in the mean time were taking advantage of his confinement, to draw away disciples after them, and seeking thereby to add affliction to his bonds. And what effect had these upon him? As for his own sufferings, from whatever quarter they came, he was persuaded they would issue in his everlasting salvation; whilst the efforts of the teachers, notwithstanding the corruptness of their motives, would issue in the salvation of others: his mind therefore was kept in perfect peace, and he was equally willing either to live or die, assured that Christ would certainly be magnified in his body, whether by life or death. This blessed state

of equanimity is admirably depicted in the words of our text. In order to take a fuller view of it, we shall point out,

I. The prospects of the Apostle—

These were truly blessed both in life and death :

1. In life—

[Two objects were near his heart; namely, to honour Christ, and to benefit the Church. "To him to live was Christ." To exalt Christ, to make known his salvation, and to extend the boundaries of his kingdom, was his constant aim, his sole employment — — — To further the welfare of the Church also, by confirming the faith, and advancing the happiness, of the disciples, this was the office that had been delegated to him by God himself, and which he had now for many years endeavoured to execute to the utmost of his power.

He had already succeeded to an astonishing extent in promoting these objects; and he had no doubt but that, if his life were prolonged, they would continue to be advanced by means of his ministrations — — —]

2. In death—

[Having fled for refuge to the hope set before him, he was well assured that he was accepted in the Beloved. He had already for many years been with Christ by faith, walking as before him, depending upon him, holding sweet fellowship with him, and receiving continually out of his fulness: but he expected, immediately on his departure from this world, to be with him in a more intimate and immediate manner, beholding his glory, and enjoying the fullest possible communications of his love — — —]

Not that these prospects were peculiar to him. The weakest Christian enjoys the same, only in an inferior degree: for every one who truly believes in Christ, will assuredly seek the advancement of his kingdom, and may firmly expect a participation of his glory.]

Though these prospects were so glorious, yet they created some embarrassment in his mind. He proceeds to mention,

II. The straits and difficulties to which they reduced him—

He speaks not indeed of any serious difficulties,

but only of a dilemma to which he was reduced by the contrary desires within him^a:

For his own sake he wished to die—

[“To die,” he says, “would be gain to him.” And a glorious gain indeed it must be to one so prepared for death as he! To get rid of sin, and sorrow, and temptation, and suffering, of every kind; to have all the faculties of his soul perfected, all its capacities enlarged, all its wishes accomplished; to behold all the glory of his God and Saviour; to join with all the hosts of heaven in songs of joy and triumph; and to enter upon a state of unalienable everlasting felicity; well might he say, “This is far better:” for even *his* exalted happiness whilst on earth, must fall infinitely short of such a state as that — — —

We wonder not therefore that he wished to exchange his present trials for that unutterable bliss — — —]

For the sake of others he wished to live—

[It certainly was very desirable, and, in some sense, “needful” for the Church, that his labours should still be continued to them. They still needed his instruction to guide them, and his influence to preserve them, in the right way. Doubtless God could have guided and preserved them, without the intervention of any human being: but He has ordained men to be the instructors of his Church, and has connected the prosperity of his people with the labours of their ministers: and therefore the Apostle’s labours were of infinite value to those who could enjoy them. This he felt: he had reason to think, that, if he were spared to come to them again, their faith would be strengthened, and their rejoicing in Christ Jesus would be more abundant “*through him*”^b.] Indeed the Church is a great hospital, in which experienced physicians regularly attend to the wants of the patients, and administer to them respectively from the inexhaustible storehouse of God’s word, whatever they judge most suited to their necessities — — —

From this consideration, he was as willing to live, as from other views he had been desirous to die: and he was for a while perplexed by the opposite attractions of the public benefit on the one hand, and his own personal advantage on the other.]

^a We apprehend that the 22d verse should rather be translated thus: “But whether it be worth my while to live in the flesh, and what I shall choose, I know not.” This not only renders the verse intelligible, but the whole passage luminous. See Beza, *in loc.*

^b ver. 25, 26. *ἐν ἐμοί*. To translate this “*for me*,” lowers the sense exceedingly.

But benevolence soon triumphed, and formed,

III. The ultimate decision of his mind—

[Whether God made any revelation to him on the subject, or he inferred the purposes of God from the effects of divine grace operating on his soul, we know not: but he knew that he should abide and continue with the Church for some time longer; and he cordially acquiesced in this appointment. His mind was instantly assimilated to the mind and will of God: and he was willing to *bear* more, that he might *do* more; and to postpone *his own* enjoyment even of heaven itself, that he might bring *others* to enjoy it with him.

Blessed disposition of mind! how honourable to the Christian character! how worthy to be imitated by all who name the name of Christ! Yes; thus should we all “seek not our own things, but the things of Jesus Christ;” and “not our own wealth, but the wealth of others” — — —]

This subject furnishes abundant matter,

1. For painful reflection—

[How few are there, even of the people of God, who attain to this heavenly *state of mind*! As for the ignorant ungodly world, they are indeed often reduced to a strait, not knowing whether it is better to protract their miserable existence on earth, or to terminate it at once by some act of suicide. And if they choose life rather than death, it is not from love to God and to their fellow-creatures, but from the fear of that vengeance which awaits them on their departure hence. Ah! terrible dilemma! yet how common! The people of God, it is true, are, for the most part, far enough removed from this. What they may for a moment be brought to, under some extraordinary weight of trial and temptation, we presume not to say: for Job, that holy and perfect man, has sufficiently shewn us what is in the human heart. But peace and joy are the usual attendants on a state of acceptance with God: and it is the believer's own fault, if he possess not such foretastes of heaven, as to make him long for death, as the door of entrance into perfect bliss. O my brethren, why is not this your state? Is it not owing to your retaining too much the love of this world in your hearts? Is it not owing to secret declensions from God, and to your not meditating sufficiently on the glories of heaven? Let me entreat you to gird up the loins of your mind, to take continual surveys of your future inheritance, and so to live in habitual fellowship with Christ, that death may be disarmed of its sting, and be numbered by you amongst your richest treasures^c.]

^c 1 Cor. iii. 21, 22.

2. For interesting inquiry—

[*How are we to obtain that blessed state of mind?* The answer is plain: Let it be “to us Christ to live;” and then it will assuredly be “gain to die:” and, however great our desire after that gain, we shall have a self-denying willingness to live, for the honour of Christ, and the benefit of his people. Let us then seek a due sense of our obligations to Christ, that we may be constrained to live entirely for him. Let our first inquiry in the morning be, What can I do for my Lord this day? And in the evening, Have I rendered to him this day according to the benefits I have received from him? By such exercises we shall get our hearts inflamed with holy zeal for his glory; and shall be made willing to forego even our own happiness in heaven for a season, that we may serve him the longer on earth, where alone we can render him any effectual service. We shall lay out ourselves to make Christ more known, and his people’s joy in him more abundant. In short, if we get the principles of the Apostle rooted in our minds, we shall exhibit a measure at least of his holy practice in our lives^d.]

^d If this were a *Funeral Sermon* for any eminent minister or Christian, his example might here be modestly commended, and proposed for imitation.

MMCXLI.

A HOLY CONVERSATION RECOMMENDED.

Phil. i. 27. *Only let your conversation be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ; that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel.*

THE interests of immortal souls should be dear to every one, but most of all to the ministers of Christ. Neither the height of prosperity, nor the depth of adversity, should ever induce us to forget them. Our blessed Lord, when in the bosom of his Father, could not rest, (if we may so speak,) till he had undertaken our cause; nor in the midst of all his sufferings did he relax his solicitude in our behalf. St. Paul also, in every diversity of state, was so intent on the salvation of his fellow-creatures, that he counted not even his

life dear to him, if only he might be instrumental to their eternal welfare. He was now in prison at Rome: yet what employed his thoughts? He had a request to make to the Philippian Church: and what was it? Did he desire that they would endeavour to liberate him from his chains? No; he was unmindful of himself, and solicitous only that they should adorn the Gospel. For this “*only*” did he labour; and this “*only*” did he desire.

We notice, in the words before us,

I. His general exhortation—

The standard at which the Christian is to aim, is widely different from that with which the rest of the world are satisfied. We can easily understand that different modes of living would become a prince and a beggar, or a philosopher and a child: we can readily conceive also, that if a company of angels were sent down to sojourn upon earth, and a direction were given them to live suitably to their high station, it would import pre-eminent sanctity in the whole of their conversation. From hence we may form some idea of the exhortation in the text. The Christian is “a citizen of no mean city;” he is a citizen even of heaven itself: and he is to order his life in such a way, as becomes the society to which he belongs^a. The Gospel is the charter of their privileges, and the directory of their conduct: and they are to walk as becomes,

1. The wonders it unfolds—

[Contemplate the great mystery of redemption: contemplate the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, together with the offices he still continues to execute for his people’s good — — — Contemplate the favour with which the Father regards them in and through his beloved Son — — — Contemplate the love of the Holy Spirit, who condescends to make their polluted bodies and souls his habitation, in order that through his gracious influences they may be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light — — — What kind of a life do such mysteries of love and mercy require? Should not our souls be lost, as it were, in wonder, love and praise? — — —]

^a This is the precise idea of πολιτεύεσθε.

2. The profession it calls us to—

[We profess to be “as lights in the world,” “as cities set on a hill:” we profess to be “born from above,” to be “transformed into the Divine image,” yea, to be “changed into the Divine image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of our God.” In a word, we profess to be “epistles of Christ, known and read of all men;” insomuch that no one can behold us, without seeing the mind and will of God exhibited in living characters before his eyes. What then is the conversation suited to such a state? Is a mere negative holiness sufficient, or a lukewarm performance of religious duties? Who will behold *God* in such a conduct as that? If we are to exhibit Christ to the world, we must “walk altogether as Christ walked:” his temper, his spirit, his conduct, must be ours — — —]

3. The benefits it confers—

[Take a distinct view of these : survey the pardon of sins unnumbered, the peace that passeth understanding, the strength for every duty, the access to God on all occasions, the joy unspeakable and glorified, the prospects opened in a dying hour, the crowns and kingdoms reserved for us in a better world — — — What manner of persons ought *we* to be, who have such mercies vouchsafed unto us? Does it become such persons to be weighing out their services by drachms and scruples, if we may so speak? Should we not “love and serve God with *all* our heart, and *all* our mind, and *all* our soul, and *all* our strength?” The continual habit of our minds should be, “What shall I render unto the Lord?” — — —]

But, that we may not spend all our time in mere *general* truths, let us proceed to notice,

II. His particular directions—

A Christian minister is not like the ostrich, which having laid her eggs in the sand, pays no further attention to them; but like a tender mother, who, after having brought forth her infant, travails with it in birth a thousand times, through her fond solicitude for its welfare^b. If present with his people, he watches over them with care; if absent from them, he anxiously inquires respecting their state. To see good in them, and to hear it of them, is, next to his personal enjoyment of God, his chief happiness. He

^b Gal. iv. 19.

can say with truth respecting them, “I live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.” Now, amongst the various blessings which he desires them to enjoy, there are two in particular, to which we would call your attention;

1. An union of heart among themselves—

[This is essentially necessary to the welfare of any Church: if there be dissensions and divisions among them there will soon be confusion and every evil work. And where shall we look for union, if not among the household of God? Have they not all one faith, one hope, one baptism, one God and Father? Are they not all members of one body, all animated by the same Spirit, all heirs of the same glory? It was from these very considerations that the Apostle urged the Ephesian Church to cultivate an humble, meek, forbearing, and forgiving temper, and to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace;” and, as in the text, made it his one request to them, when he was a prisoner at Rome^c. Of how much importance he thought this temper to be, we may judge from what he himself says in a few verses after the text: we cannot conceive language more tender, or motives more powerful, or entreaties more urgent, than he there addresses to them^d; and the one point that he there presses upon them is, that they would be “like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, and of one mind.”

This then we would impress upon your minds as a matter of indispensable necessity. There will of course, amongst a number of persons whose former views, habits, and dispositions have been so different, arise many occasions of difference, perhaps also of dissatisfaction and disgust: but Christians should regard the smallest symptom of disunion, as they would the beginnings of a conflagration in the house wherein they dwelt: every one should have his personal feelings swallowed up in an attention to the common cause. All should have one object, and unite their efforts to accomplish it, and banish in an instant whatever might obstruct their exertions for the general good. That this will sometimes be attended with difficulty, is implied in the very exhortation to “*stand fast* in one spirit:” but it *may* be done; and, if our hearts be right with God, it *will* be done.]

2. A zealous attachment to the faith of Christ—

[Many things there are which may operate to turn us from the faith of Christ. That which the Apostle more especially

^c Eph. iv. 1—6.

^d Phil. ii. 1, 2.

had in view, was the dread of persecution^e: and certain it is, that the fear, not only of death, but even of an opprobrious name, causes many to draw back from their holy profession. But we must "take up our cross daily, and follow Christ;" yea, we must "follow him boldly without the camp, bearing his reproach." In this holy fortitude we should all unite: for the defection of one has a tendency to weaken all the rest. "*With one mind* therefore we should *strive together* for the faith of the Gospel." We should endeavour to preserve in our own souls a love of the truth, and in every possible way to recommend it to those around us. We should bear in mind the benefits which we hope to receive from the Gospel, and the obligations we have to hold fast our profession of it: and we should determine, through grace, to seal it (if need be) even with our blood.

We must be careful, however, not to spend our zeal about the circumstantials of religion, or to cloke a bigoted attachment to a party under a pretence of love to Christ: it is the Gospel itself, and the blessed truth which it unfolds, that we are to contend for; and for that we are to be ready to lay down our lives.

To hear of these two things, an orderly and affectionate agreement among themselves (like that of a well-disciplined army), and a steadfastness in the faith of Christ, is the greatest joy of a minister, when, by the providence of God, he is for a time removed from them^f: in reference to both of them, therefore, we would address you in the language of the Apostle, "Brethren, dearly beloved and longed-for, my joy and crown, *so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved* ^g."]

^e ver. 28.

^f Col. ii. 5.

^g Phil. iv. 1.

MMCXLII.

SUFFERING FOR CHRIST'S SAKE, A GIFT OF GOD.

Phil. i. 29. *Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.*

THE chief obstacles to a holy and consistent conduct arise perhaps from within, from the evil propensities of our own hearts. But very serious difficulties are occasioned by the frowns and menaces of an ungodly world. We are naturally afraid of suffering; and are easily deterred from those things which would subject us to heavy trials. But if we considered the

cross as a badge of honour, as a source of good, and as a high favour conferred upon us by God himself, we should feel less anxious to avoid it, and be more emboldened to walk as becometh the Gospel of Christ. It is by this view of sufferings, that the Apostle encourages the Philippians to hold fast their profession without wavering. His expressions are singularly bold and striking: they shew us,

I. That suffering for Christ's sake, is a favour conferred on us by God himself—

Believers are called to suffer for Christ's sake—

[In addition to the sufferings which are common to others, the believer is called to endure contempt, and reproach, and persecution, for the Gospel's sake. He is taught to expect them^a: and experience proves, that however amiable, or useful, or discreet he may be, he cannot avoid the odium attaching to true religion.]

But his sufferings are a gift from God himself—

[As far as respects his persecutors, his trials arise from a malignant effort of men and devils to obstruct the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom: but as far as respects God, they are a special gift from him. As the faith, on account of which he suffers, is given him, so also are the sufferings themselves, together with the ability to endure them patiently. They are bestowed purely for Christ's sake^b; and are appointed in number, weight, and duration, so as to conduce most effectually to his eternal welfare.]

We may observe further concerning his cross,

II. That it is a richer gift than even faith itself—

Faith is certainly an inestimable gift; yet the gift of suffering for Christ's sake is far greater—

1. It is a higher privilege in itself—

[In believing, we *receive from God* all the blessings which we stand in need of: but in suffering, we *give to God*: we give our name, our property, our liberty, our life, to be disposed of in any way which may tend most to his glory. What an honour is this, for a poor creature, a worm of the earth, to

^a Matt. v. 10—12. 1 Cor. iv. 18. 2 Tim. iii. 12.

^b We may conceive Christ soliciting the greatest of all favours on behalf of a beloved disciple; and, on being desired by his Father to specify it, replying, "Father, I ask that he may have the honour of suffering for me:" which the Father graciously condescends to grant.

confer a gift on God himself! Surely, much as we are indebted to God for the gift of faith, the giving us an opportunity to honour him should be esteemed a far richer obligation, nor should any thing that we possess be of any value in our sight, if we may but have the honour of sacrificing it for his sake.]

2. It is a nobler testimony for God—

[When we believe, we bear testimony for God that his word is true, and that not one jot or tittle of it shall ever fail. But when we suffer for him, that testimony is far more plain and unequivocal. We then declare, not only that God is good and true, but that he is deserving of all that we can possibly do for him; that there is no service so hard, but we should cheerfully engage in it; no suffering so severe, but we should cheerfully endure it for his sake. Hence it is said, that while “by his enemies God is evil spoken of, on the part of his suffering friends he is glorified.”]

3. It is a more instructive lesson to the world—

[We cannot exercise faith in Christ, but we must by that very act convey instruction to those around us. We exhibit somewhat of that change which takes place in the converted; and are, as it were, “epistles of Christ, known and read of them” who would not read the Scriptures themselves^c. But by suffering patiently for Christ’s sake, we speak more loudly in their ears: we force them to inquire, what inducements we can have to make such sacrifices? and, whence we derive our ability to sustain such trials? And so efficacious have been the examples of many while enduring the torments of martyrdom, that their very persecutors have been overcome, and converted to God.]

4. It is a clearer evidence of grace—

[Many have believed the Gospel, while yet their hearts were not upright before God. They have been convinced in their judgment, but not converted in their souls^d. The same observation may apply also to some who have suffered for the Gospel’s sake^e. But a patient enduring of trials for Christ’s sake is certainly a very strong test of sincerity. It gives reason to hope, that we have attained some measure of conformity to Christ, and that “the Spirit of glory and of God resteth on us^f. There may indeed be some corruptions yet remaining to be mortified, which leave room for doubt respecting the present safety of the soul; but if we combine a zealous endeavour to mortify them, with a cheerful submission to the cross of Christ,

^c 2 Cor. iii. 2, 3.

^d John ii. 23, 24. Acts viii. 13, 20, 21.

^e Gal. iii. 4.

^f 1 Pet. iv. 13, 14. with ver. 28.

we shall have a favourable testimony from God^g, and a happy issue to our present conflicts.]

5. It is a richer mean of glory—

[The smallest portion of *real* faith has the promise of eternal life^h: and in this view it may be thought superior in value to every thing else. But suffering for Christ's sake is the means of augmenting that glory: it brings a recompence proportioned to the sufferings that are enduredⁱ, and “works out for us, light and momentary as it is, a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory^k.” Now as health is a richer blessing than life, because it implies well-being as well as mere existence, so a patient suffering for Christ's sake must be accounted of more value than faith, because of the super-eminent degrees of happiness to which it eventually exalts the soul.]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who *fear* sufferings—

[It is painful to flesh and blood to bear the cross: but what must be the consequence of shunning it? Will not our case be dearly purchased? Ah! think of the fate that awaits “the fearful,” and tremble lest the preservation of your life for a season issue in the loss of it to all eternity^m.]

2. To those who *feel* them—

[Faint not, nor be discouraged. Would you deprecate what Christ has asked of you, and what is given you in his behalf! He who confers on you the honour of suffering for him, will endue you with strength to bear your trials, yea, to rejoice and glory in themⁿ. Only view your sufferings in their true light, and you will rejoice that you are counted worthy to bear them^o. And, when you shall be joined to that blessed company “who came out of great tribulation^p,” you shall not regret one loss that you sustained, or one pain that you endured. The approbation of your judge, and the increased weight of glory which shall be awarded to you, shall soon wipe away your tears, and turn all your sorrows into joy.]

3. To those who *occasion* them—

[Little do you think against whom you fight. You imagine that you are only opposing weak enthusiasts; but so thought Saul, when, in fact, he was persecuting Christ himself^q. Know, that “whosoever toucheth the Lord's people,

^g Rev. ii. 2—7. ^h John iii. 36.

ⁱ Heb. xi. 26. Mark x. 29, 30.

^l Rev. xxi. 8. ^m Mark viii. 35.

^o Acts v. 41. Jam. i. 2, 12.

^q Acts xxvi. 15.

^k 2 Cor. iv. 17.

ⁿ 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.

^p Rev. vii. 14.

toucheth the apple of *his* eye^r;" and that "it were better for you to have a millstone hanged about your neck, than that you should cause one of his little ones to stumble^s." Be sensible then of your guilt and danger: embrace the doctrine which you have been labouring to destroy^t: and, instead of opposing, labour to advance, the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom.]

^r Zech. ii. 8.

^s Matt. xviii. 6.

^t Gal. i. 23.

MMCXLIII.

UNITY RECOMMENDED.

Phil. ii. 1, 2. *If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.*

THE Church of Christ is one great family; all its members being children of one common Parent, and partakers of one common interest. To consult the good of the whole is the duty of each; no one regarding his own personal gratification, but all combining for the common welfare. This was a favourite topic with the Apostle Paul. The care of all the Churches having been committed to him, he had constant occasion to inculcate the necessity of union amongst the multifarious and discordant characters of which the different societies were composed. The manner in which he inculcates it in the words before us, is very remarkable, and deserves particular attention. In opening the passage to your view, we shall be led to notice,

I. The object of his desire—

He was now in prison at Rome: but his sufferings caused no diminution in his concern for the welfare of the Church of God. He saw with grief the efforts which were made by the enemies of Christ to turn aside the Philippians from the faith they had embraced; and he *therefore* urges them the more carefully to preserve amongst themselves an unity of sentiment and affection, in order that they might

give no advantage to their adversaries by intestine divisions. The object, I say, which he desired to promote, was unity of sentiment and affection—

This appears to be the true scope and import of his words: “Being joined together *in love*, be united also *in sentiment*: and being joined together *in sentiment*, be united also *in love*, so as to have *one soul penetrating the whole body*^a.” An unity in these respects is, it is true, very difficult to be attained—

[Considering how the human mind is constituted, it is scarcely to be expected men should be perfectly agreed upon any point; and least of all upon religion, where the subjects themselves are so deep and mysterious, and where so great a scope for difference of sentiment is afforded by the terms in which the truth is revealed. There is not unfrequently *in appearance* an opposition between the things that are revealed: (I say *in appearance*; for it is not possible that there should be any *real* contrariety in things which have been delivered by inspiration of God:) and it may be expected that different persons will lean to different sides, according to the weight which the different positions appear to have in the general scale of truth. Besides, the deep things of God are discerned only by means of a spiritual perception imparted to us by the Spirit of God: and of course they will be more or less justly viewed, according to the measure of grace that has been given to us, and according as our visual organs have been purified from the films that obscure or distort the truth.

Of course, an unity of affection must be considerably impeded by these circumstances: for we naturally agree best with those whose sentiments we approve: and if there be any great diversity of sentiment on important topics, we are apt to feel a proportionable alienation of heart from the person in whom it exists.]

But though a perfect union in these respects is difficult, it is, as far as is necessary for all practical purposes, certainly attainable—

[We are expressly taught, that it *should*, and *may*, exist in the different members of Christ’s mystical body^b — — The way to attain it is, to confine ourselves to the fundamentals of religion; and to make them the bonds of union; whilst the less evident or less important truths are left as

^a See the original, which consists rather of two parts than of four, and should be construed accordingly.

^b 1 Cor. i. 10.

neutral ground, open alike to either party, and to be occupied or not by each, as they see fit. What the fundamentals are, may, it is true, be differently stated: but, if Christianity be viewed in its true light as *a remedy*, and we agree in *the depth of the malady* it is proposed to cure; *the means of healing*, through the atoning blood of Christ, and the influences of his Spirit; and *the duty of those who are healed*, to devote themselves unreservedly to the service of their God; if, I say, Christianity be viewed in this light, there will be very little difference of sentiment between those who have ever felt its efficacy. It is by going beyond these plainer truths; by laying an undue stress on some obvious doctrines, without suffering them to be tempered with those which are of an opposite aspect; by wresting from their plain import those passages which we cannot reconcile with our favourite systems; and, in a word, by exercising a dogmatical spirit on points which are beyond our comprehension, and forming them into the shibboleth of a party; it is by these things that the Church of Christ is divided: and never till we return to the simplicity of the day of Pentecost, shall we regain its unity. But when we return to the docility of little children, we shall, to all practical purposes, “see eye to eye.”]

On the attainment of this object his heart was set, as appears from,

II. The urgency of his request—

The first consideration which he urges is, the happiness which such a union would confer on him—

[He had rejoiced in their first conversion to God; as a mother does over her new-born infant: but his joy was blended with much anxiety for their future welfare. That welfare was now endangered by the efforts which were made to separate them from each other, and to turn them from the faith. Nothing but their steadfastness could comfort him: but, if he should see them cordially united together in sentiment and affection, it would complete his joy. Hence he says to them, “Fulfil ye my joy.” His very life seemed to be bound up, as it were, in the prosperity of their souls; so that in effect he says to them, as he does to the Thessalonian Church, “Now I live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.” If therefore they felt in any degree their obligations to him, they could not but labour to carry into effect the object which would so conduce to his happiness.]

To this he adds all the most powerful pleas that could operate upon the human mind—

[“Is there any consolation in Christ?” As believers, they could not but know that there was in him a fund of

consolation; a mine, the treasures of which were altogether unsearchable. Who can contemplate the covenant which he entered into for the redemption of a ruined world, together with all that he did to accomplish this stupendous work; his mysterious incarnation, his holy life, his meritorious death, his glorious resurrection and ascension, his intercession for us at the right hand of God, and his exercise of all power as the Head of his Church, and as the life of every believer in it; who can contemplate all this, and not be comforted in the thought of such a Saviour, and in the hope of such a salvation? The greatness of his person, the suitableness of his undertaking, the sufficiency of his work, and his fidelity to all his promises—where can consolation be found, if not in these?

But what enjoyment can any have of these things, if their minds be distracted with controversies, and their hearts embittered with discord? Whatever any may profess to the contrary, it is only when the mists of controversy are dispelled, that the cheering rays of the Sun of Righteousness can penetrate and revive the soul.

The same may be said respecting “the comfort of love.” That there is unspeakable comfort in the existence and exercise of love, what Christian does not know? The presence of love argues, and, if I may so speak, constitutes, the in-dwelling of the Deity in the soul: as the loving Apostle has said, “God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.” But sweet as is the harmony of kindred souls, it cannot long exist, when once the discordant strings of controversy are touched. The voice which but lately delighted with its sounds the ravished ear, loses its interest, when once it has begun to make the Saviour’s name a subject of dispute. Diversity of sentiment on such important matter as religion soon creates coolness in the affections, and alienation in the heart. Shall we then willingly admit amongst us a disposition of mind so adverse to our best interests, and so destructive of our truest happiness?

Nearly allied to this is “the fellowship of the Spirit:” for the Church of God is not merely one *family*, but one *body*, every member of which is animated and enlivened with the same soul. The Holy Spirit who pervades them all, produces a holy fellowship between them; between not those only that are contiguous to each other, but those also which are most remote; it unites in one the inhabitants both of heaven and earth. But this also is interrupted by the introduction of discordant sentiments; and the magnetic attractions, by which it brought all under one common influence, cease to operate with effect, and leave the mass of Christians as unconnected and indifferent to each other as the world around them.

Of “bowels and mercies” also the true Christian is possessed.

He has felt towards himself the compassions of his God; and he desires to manifest towards all his brethren a measure of the same tender care. But discord shuts up all these tender emotions, and banishes from the mind this affectionate solicitude; so that hostility will take the place of love, and anathemas be hurled, where nothing but mutual endearments have before prevailed. St. Paul probably had more particularly in view the effect which their dissensions would produce upon his own mind: they would be as a dagger to his soul: and could the Philippians, who had so richly participated his love, make such a return? No; if they had any bowels and mercies existing in them, they would avoid a conduct which would so augment the distresses which, for their sakes and for the sake of the whole Church, he was now enduring. God had promised to his people, to “give them *one heart* and *one way*, that they might fear him for ever, for the good of them and of their children after them:” and this unity he besought them, if they valued either their own welfare or his happiness, most strenuously to maintain. He would have them all to be not only one *body*, but to have one *soul*, and one *spirit*, pervading all.]

Earnestly desiring that the same heavenly disposition may abound in you also, I would, with most affectionate entreaty, RECOMMEND,

1. That you guard against every disposition that may interrupt this harmony—

[The Apostle particularly cautions the Philippians against “strife and vain-glory,” and exhorts them “in lowliness of mind to esteem others better than themselves.” So would I also caution you against the indulgence of a proud, conceited, self-sufficient spirit, which is the bane of all social harmony and Christian love. These malignant dispositions have been at the root of all those animosities which have in different ages disturbed and divided the Church of God^c — — — Only let self be mortified and subdued, and love will reign; yea, it will so reign, that your union with your brethren shall resemble that which subsists between the Father and Christ himself^d.]

2. That you seek those blessings which have a sanctifying efficacy on the soul—

[What love will not the consolation that is in Christ inspire? What will not a person who tastes “the comfort of love” do to preserve love; and one who enjoys the “fellowship

^c Jam. iii. 14—18.

^d John xvii. 21.

of the Spirit," to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace? If you yearn over the desolations of Zion, and have your "bowels and mercies" moved at the distresses of those around you, you will never willingly contribute to disturb the harmony of the Church by doubtful disputations. You will strive for peace; and in that exercise of love will reap in your own souls the richest reward. Such is the exhortation of St. Paul to the Colossian Church; and such is that with which I shall conclude the present discourse: "Put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness, unto which ye are called in one body, and be ye thankful^e."]

^e Col. iii. 12—14.

MMCXLIV.

ESTEEMING OTHERS ABOVE OURSELVES.

Phil. ii. 3. *In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.*

IT is a common and universally approved saying, that the tree may be known by its fruit. Now we would have the Gospel brought to this test: and we are willing that it should be accepted or rejected, according to the issue of this trial. That good things have been spoken by uninspired men on the subject of humility, we readily admit: for modesty, and a deference to the sentiments of others, necessarily commend themselves to the judgment of every considerate mind. But we apprehend that the precept before us is peculiar to Christianity; and, as a maxim in morals, it stands unrivalled in the whole world. In support of this injunction, I will endeavour to shew,

I. Its import—

Certainly it must be understood with some kind of qualification and exception: for it can never be meant, that a philosopher is to esteem an illiterate peasant wiser than himself; or that a man of strict

morals is to regard a notorious drunkard or libertine as more holy than himself. We can never be required to entertain sentiments so entirely repugnant to truth and fact. We must suppose some kind of parity between the persons so compared; namely, that both of them profess a regard for God, and both maintain a measure of consistency in their outward conduct. But where there is nothing outward and visible to contradict the sentiment, there it should be entertained; and we each should conceive of others as better than ourselves:

1. As more pure in their principle—

[We should give persons credit for sincerity in what they profess; and not, without the strongest evidence, accuse them of hypocrisy. But every man that is acquainted with his own heart has seen in himself a sad mixture of motive, which he cannot but acknowledge before the heart-searching God; and, consequently, he will do well to regard himself as inferior to those whom he cannot convict of any guile, in comparison of what he knows to have existed and operated within his own bosom.]

2. As more consistent in their practice—

[Of his own inconsistencies, who amongst us has not reason to complain? Who, for one deviation which he sees in others, may not discern a great many in himself? We are not at liberty to indulge all manner of evil surmises, in order to reduce others to a level with ourselves; but should put ourselves below others, in proportion as we appear to have fallen short of the measure of their attainments.]

3. As more advanced in proportion to the advantages they have enjoyed—

[We all are responsible for the advantages that have been vouchsafed unto us: "To whom much has been given, of them will the more be required." Now, of the opportunities with which we have been favoured, we must be conscious; and respecting the length of time that we have professed to seek after God, we must be sensible: but, in reference to others, we must be comparatively ignorant: and therefore, even if, in point of attainment, we appear to stand on a par with them, we ought to take a lower place than they, because, from the superiority of our advantages, we ought to have been advanced far beyond them.]

Though, in explaining the import of this injunction,

I have in some measure anticipated my second head, yet I will proceed more fully to point out,

II. Its reasonableness—

The reasonableness of it appears from this, that we know incomparably more concerning ourselves, than we do, or can do, respecting others. We know more of our own,

1. Motives—

[There are workings of mind, of which even we ourselves are scarcely sensible; and which, whilst they appear good at the time, we find afterwards to have been evil. The two Apostles who would have called fire from heaven to consume a Samaritan village gave themselves credit for a holy and becoming zeal; whilst, in fact, they were actuated by pride and revenge: our blessed Lord told them, that “they knew not what spirit they were of.” In examining our own hearts, we shall find, that, on different occasions, there has been much amiss in relation to our motives, where our actions have appeared most excellent and praiseworthy: but of the motives of others we could judge only by the actions themselves: and therefore it is but reasonable that we should account others, of whom we know no evil, better than ourselves, who have been conscious of much that has been contrary to the mind of God. The mixtures which we have discovered in ourselves of pride and vain-glory, of self-seeking and self-complacency, and of many other hidden abominations, should make us ever to lie low both before God and man.]

2. Exertions—

[We cannot but blush and be ashamed when we look back upon the sloth and indolence which we have indulged, especially when engaged in holy exercises. How slight has been our application, when reading the word of God! How languid our frame, when drawing nigh to him at the throne of grace; our confessions being destitute of all contrition; our prayers, of fervour; our thanksgivings, of gratitude! In the house of God, how have our minds wandered to the very ends of the earth; yes, and sometimes too, perhaps, been filled with all evil, when we have professed to have been engaged in the service of our God! In short, we cannot but be conscious, that we have but too often trifled with God and our own souls, when we should have been running as in a race, and striving, as in a contest, for our very lives. But in reference to others, we know not these things: and therefore it is in the

highest degree reasonable that we should “prefer them in honour before ourselves^a.”]

3. Advantages—

[We have been conscious of the strivings of God’s Spirit within our own souls; whilst respecting the experience of others we know nothing. The inward fears that have been excited in us, and the hopes we have cherished, and the consolations that have been imparted to us; the assistances, too, that we have received from Almighty God for the subjugation of our lusts, and the renovation of our souls; the discoveries, also, which have been given us of Christ, and of the great mystery of redemption; these, and a thousand other blessings which have been vouchsafed to us for the furthering of our spiritual welfare, should have been productive of a suitable and correspondent advancement in the divine life. But how little have we availed ourselves of them, and profited by them! The knowledge of this may well humble us in the dust. But, respecting other persons, we are altogether in the dark, as to their advantages, or their improvement of them: and therefore we should take the lowest place, as that which properly belongs to us, on account of our great unprofitableness.]

4. Defects—

[What know we respecting the corruptions of others, in comparison of our own? Who does not blush at the recollection of much which has passed within him, which, if known to man as it is known to God, would render him an object of pity or contempt? Who does not see, in his own temper, and spirit, and conduct, there has been abundant occasion for shame and contrition before God? But we know but little of these things in relation to others, and therefore in reason are bound to esteem them better than ourselves.]

Not to dwell any longer on the reasonableness of this injunction, I will pass on to mark,

III. Its excellency—

Suppose it to be obeyed; and then behold its influence,

1. On societies—

[It cannot have escaped our notice, how much evil arises, in the world, and in the Church, from a proud, envious, self-exalting spirit. “Whence come wars between nations, and strife and contentions between neighbours, but from the lusts that war in our members,” even from a desire to advance our-

^a Rom. xii. 10.

selves at the expense of others? “Strife and vain-glory” are, in my text, put in immediate contrast with “the lowliness of mind” which is there recommended. Suppose that all were actuated by the spirit of which we have been speaking; the little offences which occur would be scarcely noticed as worthy of a thought: a charitable construction would be put upon the motives of others, and the wounds inflicted by them would be healed in a moment. Verily, there would be nothing but love and harmony, where now exists nothing but animosity and discord^b.”]

2. On our own soul—

[O! if pride were mortified, and self-love were put away, and charity were exercised, and the soul were humbled under a sense of its own unworthiness; how many sources of pain would be cut off! how many fountains of holy pleasure would be opened to us! The trials of life, whether from God or man, would be as nothing to us; because they would appear infinitely less than our desert, and would be regarded as medicines to heal the sickness of our souls. On the other hand, our mercies, how unmerited would they appear; and what admiring and adoring gratitude would they excite within us! Every little attention from man, instead of operating to foster our vanity, would abase us rather as unworthy of such love, and stimulate us to make to him every return in our power. The whole of our frame would resemble that of the Lord Jesus Christ, “whose meekness and lowliness” were alike conspicuous, amidst the acclamations of friends, and the assaults of the most envenomed enemies.]

3. On the interest of religion in the world—

[The world are eagle-eyed in spying out the faults of those who profess religion: and when they see a vain, conceited, talkative, obtrusive, uncharitable professor, they despise him in their very souls. And truly he deserves to be despised; for “he stinks in the nostrils of God” himself^c. But the world do wrong in identifying these dispositions with religion: for religion disclaims them utterly, and altogether condemns them. On the other hand, they cannot but admire in their hearts the man who is of a meek and humble mind. True, they will not love him, because “they hate the light” which such a character reflects: but they have an inward conviction that he is right; and a wish, that, though they live not his life, they may “die his death.” They know, in their souls, that God approves such characters, and that he will distinguish

^b Eph. iv. 2, 3.

^c Isai. lxxv. 5.

them with his favour, both here^d, and in the eternal world^e. They see in such characters religion adorned and honoured^f. Would you then, brethren, recommend religion, cultivate this spirit, and account yourselves the lowest of all and the least of all^g!]

^d 1 Pet. v. 5.

^e Luke xviii. 14.

^f 1 Pet. iii. 4.

^g 1 Cor. xv. 9.

MMCXLV.

CHRIST'S HUMILIATION.

Phil. ii. 5—8. *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.^a*

ONE of the strongest characteristics of our fallen nature is selfishness. The one desire of an unregenerate man is to gratify self. Even those actions in which he seems to have most respect to God or to his fellow-creatures, will, if carefully examined, and weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, be found to have self for their principle, and self for their end. This disposition being so deeply rooted in the heart, we cannot but expect that it should operate to a certain degree, even after the evil of it is discerned, and after its allowed dominion has ceased. Doubtless there were many pious Christians in the Roman Church, as well as Timothy: yet St. Paul complained that all of them, excepting him, were in some degree under the influence of a selfish spirit, and “sought their own things rather than the things of Jesus Christ.” Against this thing therefore he

^a This subject might well be treated thus:—1. What the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us. 2. What he expects us to do for him; i. e. to have the same mind toward others as he has had toward us; and to manifest it, as far as possible, in the same way; accounting nothing too much to do or suffer for the salvation of men.

cautioned the Philippians in a most affectionate manner; beseeching them, with all earnestness, to “fulfil his joy,” in “being all of one accord and of one mind;” exhorting them to “esteem others better than themselves;” and “not to look every man on his own things, but also on the things of others.” To give the greater weight and efficacy to his exhortations, he then reminded them of the conduct of Christ towards them, and recommended it as the best pattern for their conduct towards each other: “Let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”

The words of the Apostle lead us to consider the humiliation of Christ in a twofold view—*As a fact to be believed, and as a pattern to be imitated.*

I. Let us consider it *as a fact to be believed*—

The two leading steps of Christ's humiliation were, his *incarnation* and his *death*—

Previous to *his incarnation*, he existed in a state of inconceivable glory and bliss. He “had a glory with the Father before the worlds were made.” He “was in the bosom of the Father” from all eternity. He was “the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person.” It was in and by him that God, on various occasions, appeared to men; and hence it is that the Apostle calls him “the Image of the invisible God;” not only because he bore a peculiar resemblance to the Deity, but chiefly because the Godhead, which was never seen in the person of the Father, was seen by many in the person of Christ. We are informed, in the text, that Christ was not only in the form “of God,” but that “he thought it not robbery to be equal with God,” or, as the words more strictly mean, to be *as God*^b. He assumed to himself all the titles, attributes, and perfections of the Deity. He claimed

^b The Greek is not ἵσον τῷ Θεῷ, as in John v. 18, but ἴσα, which means *as*. This is unanswerably shewn by the references which Dr. Whitby on the place has made to passages in the Septuagint, where it is *so translated*.

and exercised all the divine prerogatives. He performed by his own power all the works which are ever ascribed to God. And in all this he was guilty of no presumption; because he was truly ‘One with the Father, in glory equal, in majesty co-eternal.’ To understand the Apostle as saying, that Christ, while he was only a mere man, did not think of the robbery of being equal with God, is to represent him as commending a creature for his humility in not aspiring to an equality with God; a greater absurdity than which could not enter into the human mind. As Christ, when he took upon himself “the form of a servant,” became really man, so when, previous to his incarnation, he was “in the form of God,” he was really and truly God. To this the Scriptures bear ample testimony: they declare that before he was “a Child born and a Son given, he was the mighty God,” even “God over all, blessed for ever.” And therefore, when he became incarnate, he was “God, manifest in the flesh;” he was “Emmanuel, God with us.”

But this glory he, in infinite condescension, laid aside. Not that he ceased to be God; but that he veiled his Deity in human flesh. As, previous to his descent from Mount Tabor, he divested himself of those robes of majesty wherewith he was then arrayed; so, for the purpose of sojourning among men, he *emptied himself*^c of all his divine splendour, either hiding it altogether from human eyes, or only suffering a ray of it occasionally to beam forth for the instruction of his disciples; that, while others saw him but as a common man, *they* might “behold his glory, as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father.” He did not, however, assume our nature in its primeval state, while yet it bore the image of its Maker; but in its fallen state, encompassed with infirmities: “he was made in the *likeness of sinful flesh*,” and was “in all points like unto us, sin only excepted.”

^c ἐκένωσε ἑαυτόν.

But there was yet a lower state of degradation to which our blessed Lord submitted for our sakes, which also is mentioned in the text, and which was the very end of his incarnation; "being found in fashion as a man, he became obedient unto *death*."

When our Lord vouchsafed to take our nature into an immediate union with himself, he became from that moment subject to the law, even as we are. More especially, having substituted himself in the place of sinners, he was bound to fulfil the precepts which we had broken, and to endure the penalties which we had incurred. He was to be the servant of God in executing his Father's will; and the servant of man, in performing every duty, whether of obedience to his earthly parents, or of subjection to the civil magistrate. He knew from the beginning how arduous a course he had to run; he beheld at one view all that he must do, and all that he must suffer, in order to accomplish the purposes of his mission; and yet he freely undertook our cause, saying, "I come, I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart." And with the same readiness did he persevere "even unto death." When the extremity of his sufferings were coming upon him, he implored indeed the removal of the bitter cup, provided it could be removed consistently with his Father's glory and man's salvation. But this he did, to shew that he was really man; and to instruct his followers how to demean themselves in seasons of deep affliction. By this we see, that it is our privilege to make our requests known to God, and to implore such a mitigation of our troubles as shall render them more supportable, or such an increase of strength as may enable us to endure them. Cheerfully however did he resign himself to the will of his heavenly Father; and though twelve legions of angels were at his command to deliver him, yet did he continue fixed in his purpose to give his own life a ransom for us. Notwithstanding the death of the cross was the most painful and ignominious of any, yet to that did he submit for us; nor did he

cease from filling up the measure of his sufferings, till he could say, "It is finished."

This then is the fact affirmed by the Apostle; a fact, which we should have considered as absolutely incredible, if God himself had not plainly declared it, and confirmed his testimony by the most indubitable evidence. We are now therefore warranted to affirm, that "it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance." And though the frequency with which it is mentioned, causes it in too many instances to be heard without any emotion, sure we are, that the more it is contemplated, the more it will fill us with wonder and amazement. If we would but consider that the God of heaven and earth assumed our sinful nature, and died the accursed death of the cross, in order to redeem us from death and hell; if we would but suffer this thought fully to occupy our minds, methinks we should become like those in heaven, who cease not day and night to make it the grand subject of their united praises.

II. The more immediate view with which the Apostle introduced the subject of our Lord's humiliation, to which we also wish at this time to draw your attention, was, that he might set it before the Philippians *as a pattern to be imitated*.

It is not possible for us in all respects to imitate this bright original, since we have no glory which we can lay aside; nor is it optional with us whether we will become subject to the law or not. But, though we cannot perform the same *act* that Christ did, we may "have the same *mind* which was in him:" and beyond all doubt we ought to resemble him in these two particulars; *in feeling a tender regard for the welfare of men's souls*: and *in being ready to do or suffer any thing for their good*.

1. *We should feel a tender regard for the welfare of men's souls*. When, in consequence of the fall of man, there remained no possibility of his restoration to God's favour and image, by any thing which he

could either devise or execute, this blessed and adorable Saviour looked upon us with pity : his bowels yearned over us ; and though he had not interested himself on behalf of the angels that sinned, yet, he determined to interpose for us, and by a marvellous effort of his grace to save our souls alive. Let me ask then, what is now the state of the heathen world ? Is it not that very state to which the whole race of man was reduced by the transgression of Adam, and by their own personal iniquities ? They are under a sentence of death and condemnation. They know of no way of reconciliation with God. Being without Christ, they are altogether without hope. And though we will not presume to say that *none* of them are saved ; yet we must affirm that their condition is most pitiable, and that the notions which obtain in the world respecting the extension of God's mercy to them, are awfully erroneous. For if they can be saved without Christ, why could not *we* ? And then why did Christ ever come into the world ? If it be said, that Christ has purchased mercy for them though they knew him not, then we ask, Why did the Apostles go forth to preach to the Gentile world ? Why did they submit to such numberless hardships and labours at the peril of their lives, to bring the heathen into the fold of Christ, if they thought that they could attain salvation in their present state, or that any considerable number of them would be saved ? The Apostles knew little of that which we falsely term, charity. They believed that "there was no other name given among men whereby we must be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ : " and therefore they felt towards the heathen world as they would have done towards a crew of mariners perishing in the ocean : they went forth at the peril of their own lives, willing to endure any thing themselves, if they might but succeed in saving some of their fellow-creatures. Ought not we then in like manner to compassionate the heathen world ? Should not "our head be waters, and our eyes a fountain of tears, to run down day and night" for their perishing

condition? What infidelity must there be in our minds, or what obduracy in our hearts, if we can look upon their state without the tenderest emotions of pity and grief!

2. But to our compassion we must add also *a willingness to do and suffer any thing for their good*. When our blessed Lord beheld our misery, he flew from heaven on the wings of love to succour and relieve us. And though in order to effect his purpose he must disrobe himself of his majesty, and become like one of us, a poor, weak, necessitous creature, yea, and in our nature must submit to death, even the accursed death of the cross; he accounted nothing too valuable to forego, nothing too painful to suffer, in order to rescue us from destruction. He undertook even to be “made a curse for us,” in order “to redeem us from the curse of the law.” Thus should we not rest in listless wishes for the good of the heathen, but exert ourselves to the utmost to save their souls. What if we cannot all go forth like the Apostles; cannot some of us give liberally of our substance in order to provide them the means of instruction? cannot others afford their time and attention in order to concert measures for the establishing and conducting missions? Cannot others testify their readiness to devote themselves to this great work, saying, like the Prophet Isaiah, “Here am I, send me?” But in the disposition to fulfil this last, this most essential and urgent, duty, there is amongst us a general, a lamentable deficiency. After inquiries made in every part of England, none have as yet been found by us, endued with that union of talents and of zeal which is requisite for the work. Many, who in some respects appear fit for the office of missionaries or catechists, are so fond of their ease and worldly comforts, so fearful of encountering difficulties and dangers, so ready, like Moses, to plead their want of fitness, when their backwardness, it is to be feared, arises rather from cowardice or sloth; that there is danger lest the ardour of those who are zealous to promote the object

of missions should be damped, through a want of opportunity to exert itself with effect. It is true, (and blessed be God it is so!) that of late years several societies have arisen to promote this glorious work: and fears have been entertained, lest one should interfere with another. But what are the efforts of all of them combined, when compared with the demand there is for such exertions? If the millions of heathens who are yet in darkness be considered, the endeavours used for their instruction are scarcely more than as a drop to the ocean.

It may be said perhaps, Why are we to waste our strength upon the heathen? Is there not scope for the labours of all at home? I answer, It is well for us that the Apostles did not argue thus: for if they had not turned to the Gentiles till there remained no unconverted Jews for them to instruct, the very name of Christ would probably long since have been forgotten among men. We confess there are great multitudes in our own land as ignorant as the heathen: but yet they have the Bible in their hands; and there are in every part of the kingdom, some who are both able and desirous to instruct them. However ignorant therefore, or abandoned, thousands are amongst us, there is hope respecting them, that sooner or later their feet may be guided into the way of peace. But as for the heathen, what hope can there be respecting them? for "How can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how can they hear without a preacher?" Besides, the more our love abounds towards the heathen, the more will "the zeal of others be provoked" for the salvation of our neighbours; and the more confidently may we hope for the blessing of God upon their pious endeavours.

Let then all such excuses be put away; and let all exert themselves at least in prayer to the great "Lord of the harvest," and entreat him day and night "to send forth labourers into his harvest."

To ENFORCE what has been said, we would call your attention to some additional considerations—

Consider then, first, *what would have been the state of the whole world, if the same mind had been in Christ that is in us?* Had he been as indisposed to effect the salvation of mankind as we are to promote that of the heathen, would he have left his glory for them, would he have relinquished all the blessedness which he enjoyed in the bosom of his Father? would he have debased himself to such a degree as to take upon himself their fallen nature? would he have substituted himself in their place, and borne all their iniquities in his own person, and have become a curse for them? for them who, he knew beforehand, would murder him as soon as they should have it in their power? *No—Then* where would Adam, and all the generations that have passed in succession to the present hour, have been at this moment? They would all, without one single exception, have been wailing and gnashing their teeth in hell: and all future generations to the end of time would have lived only to fill up the measure of their iniquities, and to receive at last their tremendous doom. But, adored be his name! he “looked not on his own things so much as on the things of others:” and, in consequence of his self-denying exertions, millions are already before his throne, and myriads, countless as the sands upon the sea-shore, shall yet be added to their number, to be monuments of his love, and heirs of his glory. Shall *we* then any longer persist in our supineness? Shall we not rather exert ourselves to the utmost to imitate his love?

Consider, next, *how we are indebted to the benevolence of our fellow-creatures.* We forbear to notice the kindness of the Apostles, because they were expressly commissioned to preach the Gospel to every creature, whether of their own, or of any other nation. We will rather advert to an instance more immediately parallel to our own case. For many centuries after Christianity was promulged, our ancestors were bowing down to stocks and stones; as we ourselves also should have been, had not some pious Christian come, at the peril of his life, to bring

us the glad tidings of salvation. Suppose *he* had argued, as we are apt to do, ‘What can I do among that savage race? There are people enough of my own country to occupy all my care; and I may fulfil my duty to God among them, without encountering all the difficulties, and exposing myself to the dangers, which I must expect to meet with in such an undertaking.’ How awful, in that case, would have been our present condition! O Christians! think of all that you enjoy in Christ Jesus, your present consolations, your future prospects; think of these things, and say, ‘I owe all, under God, to him who first set his foot on our inhospitable shores, to shew unto us the way of salvation; his example stimulated others; and thus “the handful of corn that was scattered on the tops of the mountains, has grown up like the woods of Lebanon, or the piles of grass upon the earth.” Blessed, for ever blessed, be God for his labours of love!’ Who can tell then what may arise from the labours of one society, or even of a single individual? We may not see very extensive benefits in our day: and probably this was the case with respect to him who first visited Britain. But could he now behold from heaven the fruit of his labours, how would he rejoice! would he think that he had exercised too much self-denial, or patience, or diligence, in the cause of God? Would he repent of his exertions? Would he not rather repent that he had not stepped forward sooner, and been more earnest in this blessed work? Be ye then in earnest, my beloved brethren. We have lost too much time already; and millions, though unconscious of their wants, are now crying to us, as it were, “Come over to India—to Africa—and help us.” O that a holy zeal might this day inflame our breasts; and that we might requite the labours of those who have instructed us, by endeavouring to extend the benefits derived through them, to the remotest corners of the earth!

Consider, further, *how kindly Christ will accept such labours at your hands.* He tells us respecting things

of a mere temporal nature, that what we have bestowed on others for his sake, he will accept as conferred on himself; “I was hungry, and ye fed ME; naked, and ye clothed ME; sick and in prison, and ye visited ME.” And will he not much more acknowledge himself indebted to us for the spiritual blessings we confer on others? ‘I was in darkness, and ye enlightened ME; I was far from God, and ye brought ME near; I was perishing, and ye saved ME.’ O what a thought is this! how animating! how impressive! Are there any amongst us that will not seek such an honour as this? Stir up yourselves then, my brethren; and let us all join with one heart to secure at least this testimony from our blessed Lord, knowing assuredly that “we shall receive our reward,” not according to our success, but “according to our labour.”

Lastly. Consider, *how necessary it is to resemble Christ, if ever we would participate his glory.* It is not by our profession that we shall be judged in the last day, but by our true character exhibited in our practice. Think not that the formal, the careless, the supine, shall meet with tokens of God’s acceptance: it is the man who abounds in “works and labours of love for Christ’s sake,” who shall be honoured with the approbation of his Judge. It is not he who bears the name of Christ, but who has within him the *mind* of Christ, who shall be counted worthy to dwell with him for ever. He himself tells us, that “not he who merely says, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of our Father which is in heaven.”

If then ye cannot be moved by more ingenuous considerations, reflect on this: and tremble, lest after all your profession of Christianity, you prove only as sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. Let those whose consciences condemn them for their past inactivity, cry mightily to God for the pardon of their sins, and the renovation of their souls. And may God pour out upon us this day a spirit of faith and love; that we may feel a holy ambition to engage in

his service: and may all the endeavours, whether of this or any other society, be abundantly blessed, to the enlargement of the Redeemer's kingdom, and to the salvation of many souls! Amen and Amen.

MMCXLVI.

THE EXALTATION OF CHRIST.

Phil. ii. 9—11. *Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

WE are told by an inspired Apostle, that the great scope of the prophecies related to “the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.” To the same points our attention is continually turned in the New Testament. Sometimes they are stated as an accomplishment of prophecy, and as proofs of Christ's Messiahship: sometimes as grounds of our hope before God: sometimes as motives to stimulate us to duty: sometimes as models, according to which God will work in us: and sometimes as examples, which we are bound to follow: and sometimes as encouragements to follow those examples. It is in this last view that we are to contemplate this stupendous mystery at this time. The Apostle had said, “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” To illustrate and enforce this exhortation, he shews how the Lord Jesus Christ had emptied himself of all his own glory, and endured death, even the accursed death of the cross, for the salvation of men: and that in consequence of it he had received such tokens of his Father's approbation as were commensurate with the sacrifice which he had made. In considering this testimony of his Father's love, let us mark,

I. The height to which he was raised—

The Lord Jesus Christ, *as God*, was incapable of elevation: but, *as man*, he was raised from the lowest degradation to the highest degrees of glory.

Amidst the depths of his humiliation he was greatly exalted—

[At his baptism he received an audible testimony from heaven, together with a visible communication of the Spirit of God, in attestation of his Messiahship. In all the miracles he wrought, a further testimony was borne to him by the Father. And in his last hours, when in appearance he was even deserted by his heavenly Father, universal nature bore witness to him; the sun going down, as it were, at noon-day; the earth rending and quaking to its very centre; and the most convincing evidence being given to all, that he whom they crucified was indeed the Son of God.]

But it was not till after that period that the exaltation spoken of in the text commenced—

[At his resurrection, he was declared to be the Son of God with power — — — At his ascension, he led captivity itself captive, and, surrounded with myriads of holy angels, went to take possession of his Father's throne — — — Seated on that, he is elevated above all the works of God's hands; above men, so as to be "higher than the kings of the earth," even "King of kings and Lord of lords^a:" and above angels also, "all the principalities and powers of heaven being made subject unto him^b" — — —]

The text requires us particularly to notice,

II. The reason of his exaltation—

It was in consequence of his previous humiliation: it was,

1. As a reward of his sufferings—

[In this view it had been promised to him^c — — — In this view he himself looked forward to it with intense desire^d — — — And in this view it was actually conferred upon him^e — — —]

2. As the means of completing the work he had undertaken—

[He was to redeem us, both by price, and by power. On this account, after he had paid the price of our redemption,

^a Ps. lxxxix. 27. Rev. xix. 16. ^b 1 Pet. iii. 22. Heb. i. 5, 8, 9, 13.

^c Isai. lii. 13—15. and liii. 10—12. ^d Heb. xii. 2. John xvii. 4, 5.

^e Dan. vii. 13, 14. Heb. i. 3, 4.

he was invested with "all power both in heaven and in earth;" and "all things were given into his hands," that he might order every thing for the accomplishment of his own will, and the furtherance of the work which he had begun. In him was all fulness treasured up, that he might impart unto his people all needful supplies of grace^f; and to him was all authority committed, that he might put all enemies under his feet^g. Thus, by his elevation, are his triumphs and the triumphs of all his people, finally and eternally secured.]

But we have further to notice his exaltation in reference to,

III. The end of it—

It was that he might be the one object,

1. Of universal adoration—

[Of this he is most worthy, as all the hosts of heaven testify^h — — And it must be paid to him: for God has sworn with an oath, that it shall be paid to him by all in heaven, earth, and hellⁱ; or if we will not yield it to him as the voluntary expression of our love, we shall be constrained to acknowledge his right to it, whilst we are suffering under the stroke of his avenging rod^k.]

2. Of unlimited affiance—

[By confessing him to be both Lord and Christ, I understand such a confession as proceeds from unfeigned faith^l. And to this full affiance is he entitled, both according to his essential nature as God, and in his mediatorial capacity as the Saviour of the world^m. In what way it is to be manifested, the prophet tells us: "Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strengthⁿ." As "the Christ," who died for us, he is our righteousness; and as "the Lord," who is the Head and Governor of all, we receive out of his fulness all needful supplies of grace and strength.

Nor let it be thought that this direction of our regards to him will derogate at all from the honour of the Father: for, on the contrary, it will be "to the glory of God the Father," whose wisdom has devised, and whose love has executed, so wonderful a plan for the salvation of men. On this subject we can have no doubt; since our Lord himself has told us, that God's very design in the whole of this stupendous mystery was, "that all men should honour the Son even as they

^f Eph. i. 20—22.

^h Rev. v. 11—13.

^k Ps. ii. 1—3, 6, 9—12.

^m Isai. xlv. 22.

^g 1 Cor. xv. 25. Ps. cx. 1, 2.

ⁱ Rom. xiv. 11. with Isai. xlv. 23.

^l Rom. x. 9—11.

ⁿ Isai. xlv. 24.

honour the Father; and that he who honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father who hath sent him^o."]

BEHOLD then,

1. How awful is the state of those who submit not to him!

[We are equally rebels against him, whether we oppose him as Lord, or as Christ; whether we refuse to submit to his righteousness^p, or to his government. O reflect, ye who are going about to establish a righteousness of your own, What will ye answer to him, when he shall call you to an account for usurping his office, and making void all that he has done and suffered for you? — — — And you, who, whilst professing to trust in him as your Saviour, live in disobedience to his commands, where will you hide your heads, when he shall say, "Bring hither those mine enemies who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me?" Whatever ye may now think, ye cannot invalidate the oath of God: he has sworn, that unto him every knee shall bow; and, if ye do it not willingly, ye shall do it against your will, to your everlasting sorrow.]

2. How blessed is the state of his obedient people!

[Shall Christ be exalted to the right hand of God in vain? or will he refuse to impart to you out of his fulness? Fear not: you are committed to his care; and he will not lose one of you; "not one shall ever be plucked out of his hands." Whatever you need, it is treasured up for you in him; and "his grace shall be sufficient for you." It may be, that in his service you may be called to endure many things: but if now "he sees of the travail of his soul and is satisfied," be assured that ere long it shall be no grief to you that you were humbled for a season: for, "if you suffer with him, you shall also reign with him," and "be glorified together with him^q" in his kingdom for evermore.]

^o John v. 22, 23.

^p Rom. x. 3.

^q 2 Tim. ii. 12. Rom. viii. 17.

MMCXLVII.

GOD ASSISTS THE DILIGENT.

Phil. ii. 12, 13. *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*

THERE is no person, however eminent his attainments in religion may be, who does not need to be

exhorted and urged to press forward. The Philip-
pians, in the judgment of the Apostle, had had “the
good work begun in them;” yea, they had “obeyed
the word while he was with them,” and had made a
still greater proficiency since his departure from them:
yet he animates them to further exertions, and en-
forces his exhortation with the strongest arguments.
Thus should all Christian ministers “put their people
in remembrance of these things, notwithstanding they
may already know them, or even be established in
the truth.” Let us then receive the Apostle’s words
as addressed to ourselves in particular, while we
consider,

I. The exhortation—

God commands us to “work out our salvation”—

[We are not to imagine that salvation is either the reward
of our *merits*, or the effect of our unassisted *exertions*; for if,
as our Lord assures us, “without him we can do nothing,” it
is evident that we are far enough from being able to keep the
whole law of God; which yet we must do, if we are to receive
heaven on the ground of our own righteousness. Nevertheless
we have a work to do, a work of infinite importance, in per-
forming which we are not mere machines, but voluntary agents:
and on our performing of that work our salvation depends^a.
We must consider our ways, repent of sin, believe the Gospel,
and devote ourselves to God, not indeed as conceiving our-
selves sufficient for these things, but in dependence on that
aid, which God will afford to all who seek him in sincerity and
truth.]

But we must engage in this work “with fear and
trembling”—

[The terms “fear and trembling” do not import a slavish
dread and terror, but a holy vigilance and circumspection^b.
And there is great need of this in working out our salvation.
Let us only consider how many lusts we have to mortify, and
how many duties to perform; how many temptations we have
to withstand, and adversaries to overcome; how prone we are
to err, and how many devices Satan uses in order to deceive

^a See Acts xxvii. 25, 31.

^b This is the meaning of it in every place where it occurs:—see
1 Cor. ii. 3. 2 Cor. vii. 15. and Eph. vi. 5. That it cannot mean
slavish fear is evident from Rom. viii. 15. and vii. 6.

us; how insufficient we are of ourselves for this great work, and how awful would be the consequences of miscarrying in it; and we shall readily acknowledge that our utmost caution is little enough. St. Paul felt the force of these considerations; and notwithstanding he knew himself to be a chosen vessel unto God, he “kept his body under, and brought it into subjection, lest by any means, after having preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away^c.”]

That we may all be led to comply with this advice, let us consider,

II. The argument with which it is enforced—

To see the full force of this argument we must view it,

1. As a call on our gratitude—

[Having commended the Philippians for their obedience to God, he reminds them, whence it was that they were made to differ from others. They were by nature as destitute of any ability or inclination to serve God as any other people upon earth: but God, of his own good pleasure, and without respect to any thing in them, had given them both to will and to do what was acceptable in his sight. Now this sovereign act of grace laid them under a tenfold obligation to love and serve him: they must be vile indeed, if such love did not constrain them to obedience. Have any of us then been converted by the grace of God, and been “made willing in the day of his power?” Let us consider this mercy as the strongest of all motives for yielding up ourselves as living sacrifices, holy, and acceptable to him, as our reasonable service^d. Are we “a chosen generation, that had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy?” Let us exert ourselves to the utmost to “shew forth the praises of Him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light^e.”]

2. As an antidote to our fears—

[It is difficult to feel the importance of eternal things, and not give way to secret fears and misgivings, respecting the final success of our present exertions. And indeed, if we were required to work out our salvation by our own strength, we might well yield, not only to fear, but to utter despondency. But the argument urged by the Apostle removes our apprehensions by assuring us, that He, who has given us the will, will also give us the power, to obey him^f. It is not to mock us that God has created in us a disposition to what is good: it is not to

^c 1 Cor. ix. 27.

^d Rom. xii. 1.

^e 1 Pet. ii. 9, 10.

^f The text, with Isai. xli. 10.

abandon us at last that he has hitherto given “grace sufficient for us:” his past favours are an earnest and pledge of others yet to come: he will continue to “strengthen us in our inward man,” and will “perfect his own strength in our weakness^g.” Let us then acknowledge the force of the argument in this view; and, assured that “our strength shall be according to our day,” let us “be steadfast, immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, *forasmuch as we know that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord^h.*”]

3. As an incentive to vigilance—

[Since it is “God who gives us both to will and to do, and *that* entirely of his own good pleasure,” we must of necessity be altogether dependent on him; if he keep us we shall stand: if he leave us, we shall fall. Now God is a jealous God; and will surely manifest his displeasure if we walk unwatchfully before him. We may easily “grieve his Spiritⁱ,” yea, if we continue in wilful habits of neglect, or in any allowed sin, we may “quench his Spirit^k,” for he has warned us that “his Spirit shall not always strive with man^l,” and that, “if we rebel and vex his Holy Spirit, he will turn and become our enemy^m.” The Israelites, who, notwithstanding they were brought out of Egypt, and fed with manna from heaven, perished in the wilderness, are set forth as examples to usⁿ. And to many under temporal or spiritual afflictions may that pungent question be addressed, “Hast thou not procured this to thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the Lord, when he led thee by the way^o?” Well may this consideration stir us up to watchfulness and circumspection, lest by intermitting our labours, and relaxing our exertions in the work of our salvation, we bring upon ourselves his heavy displeasure^p.]

From hence we may SEE,

1. The beauty and harmony of Scripture doctrines—

[Our entire dependence on divine grace, together with the absolute sovereignty of God in the distribution of his favours, are here clearly stated. Yet the necessity of our working out our own salvation is as strongly declared, as if every thing depended on our own efforts. Now these are often set in opposition to each other, as though they were contrary and inconsistent doctrines. But God sees no inconsistency in them; nor shall we, if we only once learn to receive the Scriptures with the simplicity of little children, instead of

^g Phil. iv. 13. with 2 Cor. xii. 9.

ⁱ Eph. iv. 30.

^k 1 Thess. v. 19.

^m Isai. lxiii. 10. Exod. xxiii. 21.

^o Jer. ii. 17.

^p 2 Chron. xv. 2.

^h 1 Cor. xv. 58.

^l Gen. vi. 3.

ⁿ 1 Cor. x. 11.

presuming to be wise above what is written. On the contrary, the two doctrines are perfectly harmonious; nor is there any stronger argument for exertions on our part, than the freeness and sufficiency of God's grace. Let us not then set altar against altar, and doctrine against doctrine, but join in our experience those things which God has indissolubly united, and which are equally essential to our eternal welfare.]

2. The folly of the excuses which men urge in justification of their own supineness—

[One says, It is in vain for me to attempt working, unless God work in me both to will and to do what he commands. But will any man forbear to plough and sow his ground, because he cannot ensure a harvest? We are to work out our salvation to the utmost of our power, and to call upon God for all necessary assistance: it is in activity, and not in sloth, that we are to expect his aid; "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead; and Christ will give thee light:" and if we will not put forth the little strength we have, we must reap to all eternity the bitter fruits of our own supineness.

Another says, I need not concern myself much about the present state of my soul; for if God has ordained me to life, I shall live; and if he has begun the good work in me, he will carry it on. But to what purpose has God enjoined fear and trembling, if we are at liberty to indulge such a presumptuous confidence as this? It is true, that "God will keep the feet of his saints;" but it is by fear and trembling that he will keep them; his injunctions are, "Be not high-minded, but fear⁴." And, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall⁵."

Let not then the doctrines of grace be so perverted and abused: but let us exert ourselves, as if we could do all; and depend on God, as knowing that, without him, we can do nothing.]

3. The firmness of the believer's hopes—

[While the believer is maintaining continual watchfulness and care, he still enjoys peace in his soul, and oftentimes "a full assurance of hope." But on what is his hope founded? Is it on his own resolution, zeal, and steadfastness? Nothing is further from his mind: he relies on the sovereignty, the power, and the faithfulness of his God. God's grace is his own, and he disposes of it according to his own good pleasure; *therefore* the believer, while he feels himself the most unworthy of the human race, hopes that "God will shew forth the exceeding riches of his grace in acts of kindness towards *him*." "God

⁴ Rom. xi. 20.

⁵ 1 Cor. x. 12.

is able to keep him from falling; and *therefore* the believer says, "I know in whom I have believed, that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him^s." And lastly, God has confirmed his promise with an oath; and *therefore* they who have fled for refuge to the Lord Jesus, have strong consolation; because it is impossible for God to lie; and he is faithful who hath promised^t. Thus we see that the weakest Christian stands on a rock, which defies all the storms and tempests that ever can assail it. "Let us then be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might," and look to him to "fulfil in us all the good pleasure of his will," and to "preserve us blameless unto his heavenly kingdom."]

^s 2 Tim. i. 12.^t Heb. vi. 17, 18.

MMCXLVIII.

PRACTICAL RELIGION ENFORCED.

Phil. ii. 14—16. *Do all things without murmurings and disputings: that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.*

THERE are times for laying the foundations of religion; and there are times for raising the superstructure. Neither the one nor the other must be neglected, since they are both equally necessary to the completion of the sacred edifice which is to be erected in the soul. St. Paul paid due attention to them both. "As a wise master-builder, he laid the foundation" with all possible care, declaring, that though an angel from heaven were to announce any other ground of hope than the Lord Jesus Christ, he must not be credited, but rather must be held accursed. So extreme was his jealousy upon this point, that, when the Apostle Peter sanctioned, by his conduct, a sentiment that militated against the doctrine of salvation by faith, he rebuked him openly before the whole Church. On the other hand, this holy Apostle was not at all less jealous respecting the performance of good works. In all his epistles, he

inculcates the indispensable necessity of them, in order to our final happiness; and in most of them he enters very minutely into the different duties which we are to perform to God, our neighbour, and ourselves. In the beginning of this chapter he had recommended lowliness of mind^a; which he afterwards enforced from the example of Christ^b. He here continues the same subject, and inculcates a constant exercise of humility towards both God and man, as the best means of adorning our profession, and of securing to ourselves the blessedness which we look for in the eternal world. Pride fosters in the soul a murmuring disposition towards God, and a contentious disposition towards man. Humility counteracts them both. Hence he says, “Do all things without murmurings and disputings;” engage in every thing with a mind full of submission to God, and of love to man; that whatever difficulties you may have to contend with, there may be nothing in your conduct unworthy of your high and holy profession, nothing that shall endanger your eternal welfare.

To enter properly into the subject before us, it will be necessary for us to consider,

I. The principles which are here assumed—

Notwithstanding his jealousy on the subject of faith, he does not hesitate to declare,

1. That the practical efficacy of religion should be the chief object of our attention now—

[It was so to the Jews of old. They possessed the highest privileges as God’s chosen people, and had ordinances divinely appointed for their stated observance: yet neither their privileges nor their observances availed them any thing, without holiness of heart and life: their circumcision, whilst they were disobedient to the law, was as uncircumcision. To those who boasted that they were Abraham’s seed, and therefore children of God, our Lord said, “If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham;” and, “If God were your Father, ye would love me.” To the same test must our pretensions also be brought. It is in vain for us to “cry, Lord,

^a ver. 3, 4.

^b ver. 5—8.

Lord, if we do not the things which our Lord commands." It is by our obedience to his will that our blessed Lord estimates our love: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me:" and again, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." On keeping of God's commandments, so great a stress is laid, that it is made the one discriminating point between the children of God and the children of the devil. "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness, is not of God^c." Nor is any profession or privilege available for our eternal welfare without it: for "circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping the commandments of God^d."]

2. That it will be the chief object of inquiry at the day of judgment—

[If the Gospel produce not this effect, it is preached in vain; and they who dispense it, "labour in vain." As now the tree is judged of by its fruits, so will it be "at the day of Christ." In the account given us by our Lord himself, we are forewarned what will be the grounds of his decision, when he shall judge the world: those whose religion was productive of good works, will be approved and rewarded in proportion to their works: but those who lived in the neglect of good works, will be disapproved and punished. Whatever professions any may have made of faith and love, they will be brought to this test; and according to it they will be justified or condemned. Doubtless respect will be had to the principles from which their works have proceeded: for "God will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart:" but the works of all will be viewed as evidences of their internal dispositions, and will form the ground of the judgment which shall be pronounced upon them.]

These principles being established, let us proceed to consider,

II. The practice which is here inculcated—

We must not undervalue what may be called *negative* holiness; for, in truth, it is that which constitutes in a great measure the excellence of the saints. The absence of a murmuring disposition, is to a certain degree the same as positive contentment; and the absence of a contentious disposition as positive love. But it is not a low degree of these virtues that we are to seek after:

^c 1 John iii. 6—10. ^d 1 Cor. vii. 19. and 1 John i. 6. and ii. 7.

We should walk as lights in a dark world—

[It would ill become “the children of God” to walk as children of Belial: on the contrary, they should be patterns to the whole world; and should “give no occasion whatever to their enemies to speak reproachfully.” They should be “blameless and harmless, and without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse world.” Nor let this be thought a low attainment. Considering what an ensnaring world we move in, and what depraved and perverse creatures we have to deal with, it is no easy matter so to walk that no man may have any fault to find with us but concerning the law of our God. Such conduct requires incessant vigilance and circumspection on our part, and no small measure of grace from the Lord Jesus Christ. In this way we should shine as lights in a dark world, “holding forth” in the whole of our conduct and conversation “the word of life.” On every side of us there are rocks and quicksands, which prove destructive to thousands, who navigate this tempestuous ocean: and, whilst endeavouring to avoid them ourselves, we should so steer our course, as to perform the office of lights, or *light-houses*, to others; that they, following our luminous path, may escape the dangers that surround them, and reach in safety the haven of rest. This is the true view in which Christians should consider themselves: they are intended to be witnesses for God, and “epistles of Christ, known and read of all men.” They are so to walk, that others may see clearly in them a transcript of the mind and will of God; and that, conforming themselves to their example, they may advance daily in the paths of righteousness and grace.]

This alone will answer the end of ministerial exertions—

[Pastors are appointed for the perfecting of the saints: and unless this be accomplished by the word, it is preached in vain: instead of proving to the hearers “a savour of life unto life, it will be to them a savour of death unto death.” Till a minister beholds this change wrought in his people, he must of necessity stand in doubt of them^e: but when it is wrought in them, he may well rejoice over them, seeing that they shall surely be his joy and crown of rejoicing in the last day^f. Yes; blessed indeed will be the meeting which he will have with them in that day: he will recognize them as his spiritual children, and present them unto God, saying, Here am “I, and the children thou hast given me.”]

In conclusion, I will,

^e Gal. iv. 11, 19, 20.

^f 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20.

1. Guard against any misapprehension of this subject—

[Though we affirm that our works will be the ground of God's judgment in the last day, we would not be understood to intimate, that there is, or can be, any merit in our works. It is not for any worthiness in them that we are saved, but solely for the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, and brought in an everlasting righteousness for our justification before God. Our works, it is true, will be the test by which our sincerity will be tried, and the standard to which the measure of our reward will be conformed: but it is not for our blamelessness that we shall be accepted; nor will any thing be conferred upon us on the ground of merit: the whole will be a reward of grace, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, and through his obedience unto death. It is highly necessary that this matter should be clearly seen, lest our very virtues become a snare to us, and we perish at last by rejecting the salvation provided for us.]

2. Give directions for attaining the state to which we are called—

[It can be attained only by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: for it is only by faith that we can be united to him, and only by union with him that we can bring forth fruit to his glory. He himself tells us, that "without him, that is, separate from him, we can do nothing." If we attempt any thing in our own strength, we shall fail. But "through Christ strengthening us, we can do all things." To him therefore we must look; and of him we must say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." Relying on him, we shall never be confounded. Our trials may be great; but we shall be enabled to bear them: our difficulties may be great; but we shall be enabled to surmount them. Nothing shall be impossible to us, if only we live by faith in him. In the midst of temptations we shall "be preserved blameless," and our "light shall shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day."]

MMCXLIX.

MINISTERIAL ZEAL DEPICTED.

Phil. ii. 17, 18. *Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me.*

THE hope of benefiting immortal souls is most delightful to a benevolent mind; and a successful

issue to our labours is replete with joy. The disciple who was honoured with his Master's love beyond all others, even he knew "no greater joy than to see his children walk in truth^a." This accounts for the extreme earnestness with which St. Paul laboured for the salvation of men, and for their sake. He knew, that, even in the eternal world, it would augment his happiness to see that he had been instrumental in saving others; and that "he should rejoice in the day of Christ, when he found that he had not laboured in vain, or run in vain^b." Indeed, so entirely was he swallowed up in the prosperity of his converts, that he was ready even to die for them, if need were; yea, and to welcome the most cruel death as a blessing, rather than to deprecate it as an evil, if only it might be subservient to the welfare of their souls. This is a most remarkable assertion: and, for the purpose of unfolding it, I will shew,

I. What was the event which is here so gladly welcomed—

The event itself was martyrdom—

[The terms in which he speaks of martyrdom need explanation amongst us; but to Christians of that day, conversant as they were with the Jewish ritual, they would convey his meaning in a most intelligible and striking form.

The Jews had sacrifices offered every morning and every evening throughout the year. Upon these sacrifices were offered a meat-offering of flour mingled with oil, and a drink-offering of wine^c. Now, these sacrifices represented, not only the Great Sacrifice which was in due time to be offered for the sins of men, but Christians themselves, who, at the time of their conversion, are given up to Almighty God to serve him, and to glorify his name. The ministers who were instrumental in bringing them to Christ were, so to speak, the priests who offered them up: in conformity with which idea, St. Paul speaks of being the "minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the Gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost^d." But, in the passage before us there is a peculiar beauty: for the people are regarded, not only as the sacrifice that was offered, but as the priests that offered it; since,

^a 3 John, ver. 4.

^b ver. 15, 16.

^c Numb. xxviii. 3—7.

^d Rom. xv. 16.

in the very act of believing, they performed that service, which, in other sacrifices, was performed by the priest^e. And this is the very thing noticed by St. Paul in another place, when he beseeches men to “present their own bodies a living sacrifice unto God, as an acceptable and reasonable service^f.” This, too, is beautifully intimated by the Prophet Isaiah, as characterizing, in a very eminent degree, the millennial period, when converts will shew an extraordinary readiness to devote themselves to God: “All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee; the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee (not waiting for a priest to lead them, but presenting themselves for sacrifice at the foot of the altar); they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar; and I will glorify the house of my glory^g.”

‘Now,’ says the Apostle, ‘since I have seen you so willingly present yourselves as sacrifices to the Lord, I am willing to have my own blood poured forth as a libation or drink-offering, that so every one of your sacrifices may be complete, and God may be glorified in us all. And, whoever be the instrument to draw forth my blood, or with whatever horrors the shedding of it may be accompanied, I account that not worth a thought: I am in daily expectation of suffering martyrdom; and I am willing to suffer it for your sake, in any way that God himself shall see fit.’]

This he was ready to welcome as a ground of joy—

[Doubtless, to flesh and blood, the prospect of a cruel death was terrific. But the Apostle was borne up far above all the feelings of unassisted nature, and was enabled to contemplate the deepest sufferings with joy: he could look forward to death itself, not as an object of terror, but as a ground of universal joy. For, *with respect to his converts*, though it would deprive them of his instructions, and rob them of their dearest friend, yet it would tend to confirm them in the faith they had received, and would embolden them to serve the Lord without fear, yea, and with tenfold greater earnestness than ever. *With respect to Jehovah, too*, it would reflect on him the highest honour: for, though by the murderers, he would be dishonoured, by the victim he would be glorified; since it would be made obvious to all, how worthy he is to be loved and served, and how able he is to succour his tempted people under all that they may be called to suffer for his sake. And *with respect to himself*, death in such a cause would be the highest honour that could be conferred upon him^h; and he had

^e ἐπὶ τῇ θυσίᾳ καὶ λειτουργίᾳ τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν.

^g Isai. lx. 7.

^f Rom. xii. 1.

^h Acts v. 41.

no doubt but that a proportionably augmented weight of glory would be awarded to him at the tribunal of his Godⁱ.

Under these circumstances, death had no terrors for him: on the contrary, however his blood should be shed, he called on them to rejoice, both with him and for him; since the event, properly viewed, would be no other than a ground of mutual congratulation.]

Let us next consider,

II. What the welcoming of such an event should teach us—

The Apostle's spirit and conduct differ widely from that patriotic ardour which has wrought up many to the contempt of death. Pride has been in them the chief incentive, and the hope of immortalizing their own memory. As for the love of immortal souls, it has never once entered into their minds; nor have they shewn any desire that God should be glorified in them. But, in the Apostle, piety to God, and love to man, were the great principles in operation; and *self* was as much forgotten, as if he had known that the record which he had given of his views would perish with him. His exalted feelings on this occasion shew us,

1. The value of the soul—

[Of what incalculable value must their souls have been in the Apostle's eyes, when, for the advancement of their welfare, he was ready to welcome even martyrdom itself! Yet were his views perfectly correct: for the soul of any individual whatever is of more value than the whole world. Beloved brethren, if another person could do and suffer so much for you, what ought not you to do or suffer for the welfare of your own souls? Should it be any difficulty to you to devote yourselves to God? or should you regard, for one moment, the contempt or obloquy which you may incur for His sake? Methinks, you are blushing for your lukewarmness and cowardice: you are ashamed, that the things of time and sense can retain such influence over your minds. And, in truth, well may the most diligent amongst us be ashamed, when we think how near we are on the borders of eternity; and what a sacrifice they must become to the justice of God hereafter, who have not surrendered themselves as living sacrifices to his honour in the present world.]

ⁱ 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. Matt. v. 11, 12. Heb. xi. 26.

2. The wonderful love of the Lord Jesus Christ to our sinful race—

[This which is spoken of in my text has been done for us by our Lord Jesus Christ; of whom it is said, “He *poured out* his soul unto death^k.” He even came from heaven for this very purpose, and assumed our nature that he might be capable of doing it. And this he did too, not merely as a witness for the truth, or as an example to the Church, but as an atonement for the sins of all mankind. On him were laid the iniquities of us all: and, when he saw what a bloody baptism he was to be baptized with, he was quite straitened until it should be accomplished; so ardently did he desire the wished-for period. Nor was it for friends and brethren that he poured forth his blood, but for his very enemies, even for the very people who nailed him to the cross: and this too, not in the midst of consolations and supports, but under a sense of God’s wrath, and in the depths of dereliction. O! who can tell what manner of love this was? Truly, its height and depth, and length and breadth, are utterly unsearchable, and incomprehensible. Brethren, you contemplate with wonder and gratitude the example of St. Paul: but what must you think of our Lord Jesus Christ? I charge you, beloved brethren, be not insensible of this: but set it before you, and meditate upon it, till it has penetrated your inmost souls, and “filled you with all the fulness of God^l.”]

3. What is the proper character of a Christian minister—

[Even a *private Christian* ought not to fall short of the example before us: for St. John says, “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and *we* ought to lay down our lives for the brethren^m.” What then becomes the Christian *minister*, who has consecrated himself to the service of the sanctuary, and bound himself, by the most solemn ties, to live only for his God! The union of love and zeal which the Apostle manifested on this occasion should be visible in the whole of his walk before God; so that at all times he may appeal to his people as the Apostle did; “We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children; so, being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the Gospel of God only, but also *our own souls*, because ye were dear unto usⁿ.” O that there were in us such a heart as this! What blessings should we be to the places where our lot is cast!

^k Isai. liii. 12.

^l Eph. iii. 18, 19.

^m 1 John iii. 16.

ⁿ 1 Thess. ii. 7, 8.

And how ready should we be to go forth, wherever our God may call us; accounting nothing of the trials that may await us, even though life itself were the sacrifice that we were called to make. Dear brethren, let it not be said of you, "All men seek their own, and not the things of Jesus Christ;" but beg of God that you may rise to your proper character; and be enabled to "follow the Apostle, as he followed Christ."]

° ver. 21.

MMCL.

THE SELFISHNESS OF MAN.

Phil. ii. 21. *All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's.*

CANDOUR is a virtue that should be held in the highest estimation: but, if pressed beyond its proper limits, it will degenerate into indifference, and be productive of incalculable evil. It ought not to confound all distinctions between good and evil; or to betray the interests of religion, through a tenderness for the character of those who violate its dictates. Its office relates rather to the motives, than to the actions, of men. Their actions are to be tried by the standard of God's law: their principles are known to God alone: and it is the part of candour to make due allowance for the frailties of men; and to ascribe every thing to good motives, as far as the actions themselves, and the circumstances attending them, will admit of it. As for that latitudinarian principle which is falsely called candour, the Scriptures know nothing of it; nor do they countenance it in any degree. They uniformly assign to good and to evil their true and proper characters, without any respect to those who commit them: and oftentimes they speak in broad, unqualified terms, where they might, if God had seen fit, have made limitations and exceptions. In applying such passages, however, to existing circumstances, there is undoubtedly just scope for the exercise of candour. And this we shall

have occasion to shew, in discussing the subject before us.

St. Paul was now a prisoner at Rome, not knowing whether he should be liberated or put to death. In this state, he was extremely anxious about his converts at Philippi, who were themselves in a state of great suffering from enemies, whilst they were exposed to the more fatal assaults of pretended friends, who laboured to turn them from the faith. He longed exceedingly to know how they stood their ground; and wished to draw his information from a source which he could fully depend on. But he had only Timothy with him; and how to part with so dear a friend, under his present circumstances, he knew not. Yet, on the whole, he determined to exercise this self-denial; and to send Timothy to encourage *them*, and to bring him the desired information: for he had “no man with him that was like-minded with Timothy, who would naturally care for their state; for all others who were around him sought their own, and not the things of Jesus Christ.”

It may be asked, How then came he to bestow such commendations on Epaphroditus, and to send this letter by him? I answer, Epaphroditus was “a messenger,” who had come to him from Philippi; and who could not be expected to come back again to Rome, to bring him the desired information: and therefore *he* was not included in the foregoing censure; which was intended only to be applied to the Christians at Rome, who, in his deepest extremity, had forsaken him; and had thereby shewn, that they felt a greater regard for their own safety, than for the honour of their Lord^a.

That we may do justice to all, in our treatment of this subject, we will consider the Apostle’s asertion,

I. Literally, in reference to the ungodly world—

To these it is applicable in its full extent. Fallen man is wholly departed from God; and is become altogether selfish; seeking at all times his own things,

^a 2 Tim. iv. 16.

1. Supremely—

[One would have supposed, that man, however fallen, should at least have given a precedence to his God: but he chooses rather to be a god unto himself, and to consult, in the first place, what will be most conducive to his own ease, or interest, or honour. If the gratification of self, in any respect, be found contrary to the declared will of God, the authority of God is set at nought; the honour of God overlooked, as unimportant; and the pleasure, whatever it may be, is pursued, without restriction or remorse. From their fellow-man, indeed, they feel some restraint; but from God, none at all. As far as HE is concerned, they say, “Our lips are our own: Who is lord over us^b?” Nor is this on some particular occasion only: it is the prevailing habit of their minds: and, whensoever the will of God is opposed to theirs, they do not hesitate to say, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice? I know not the Lord, neither will I obey his voice^c.”]

2. Exclusively—

[In truth, man in his fallen state does not admit any competition between God and him. He chooses rather to “cast God behind his back^d,” and to live “without him in the world^e.” “The things of Jesus Christ” do not at all engage his thoughts. He never asks himself, ‘What would the Lord Jesus Christ wish me to do? What will please him? What will honour him? What will advance his glory in the world?’ These are considerations which never enter into his mind. Nor is this the case with any one particular description of persons only: it is the same with all persons, of every age, of every country, of every condition. From infancy to old age there is the same regard for *self*, to the utter exclusion of every thing that relates to Christ. There may be indeed, and often is, in ungodly men, a great concern about their own sect or party in the Church; which they, perhaps, would *call* a regard for Christ himself. But this is nothing more than a carnal principle, precisely similar to that which actuates men in relation to their own society or country. There is in it no real regard for the Lord Jesus Christ himself, but only for the particular party to which they belong: and, whatever construction *they* may put upon their actions, God, who tries the heart, will comprehend them under the censure of my text, as “seeking their own things, and not the things of Jesus Christ.” “They are empty vines, because they bring forth fruit only to themselves^f.”]

^b Ps. xii. 4.^c Exod. v. 2.^d Ezek. xxiii. 35.^e Eph. ii. 12.^f Hos. x. 1.

But the Apostle had very different persons in view. To understand his assertion aright, we must consider it,

II. Constructively, in reference to the Church of Christ—

Beyond all doubt, he referred, in his own mind, to all the Christians at Rome. But we are not to suppose that there was not one amongst them that was possessed of true piety: we must rather suppose, that their piety was of an inferior order, and that there was not amongst them any one duly qualified for the work which he would gladly have assigned him. They were all too timid, and too selfish, for the office to which, for want of any other suitable person, he had destined his beloved Timothy. Hence, in somewhat strong terms, he complained of them, as “seeking their own things, and not the things of Jesus Christ;” not intending thereby to deny their piety altogether, but only to intimate that it was at a low ebb. And how applicable this reproof is to the professors of our day, will clearly appear, whilst we observe how little there is amongst us,

1. Of self-denial—

[In whatever is gratifying to self, we are all forward enough: but if we foresee that the path of duty will involve us in difficulties and trials, we are ready to make any excuse for declining to pursue it. We dread the thought of sacrificing our present comforts, and of encountering hardships of any kind. Instead of “counting *all* things but loss for Christ,” we pause long before we will part with *any* thing: and we desire, for the most part, to have as cheap a religion as we can. The Apostle, giving us a catalogue of his sufferings for Christ, (in which he far exceeded any other of the Apostles,) says, “I was in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews, five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice I was beaten with rods; once was I stoned; thrice I suffered shipwreck; a night and a day have I been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by my own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren: in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings

often, in cold and nakedness^g." But what effect did they produce on him? Was he deterred by them from following the Lord? No: "None of these things move me," says he, "neither count I my life dear unto me, so that I may but finish my course with joy^h." And is this the spirit that obtains amongst us? Alas! alas! if we were called to endure but a twentieth part of his difficulties, it is much to be feared that the generality amongst us would utterly faint and fail; and, like John Mark, would turn back from the service of our Godⁱ.]

2. Of zeal for God—

[In persons redeemed by the blood of God's only dear Son, one might expect that there should be one constant inquiry, "What shall I render to my Lord?" and that the performance of one service should be regarded only as an introduction to another. Laborious as was the Apostle Paul, he never thought that he had done any thing, as long as any thing remained for him to do. "Like a racer in his course, he forgot what was behind, and reached forward to that which was before." Whatever the service was to which he was called, "he conferred not with flesh and blood," and said immediately, "Here am I; send me^k." But how little of this ardour do we see in the great mass of professing Christians! The advancement of Christ's kingdom appears to them a matter too remote to engage their attention; and they cloke their own indifference under the specious garb of conscious inability.]

3. Of love to man—

[This was particularly in the mind of the Apostle as a very chief ground of his censure: "I have no man like-minded, who will *naturally* care for your state." A concern for the welfare of men's souls was scarcely found amongst them, especially such a tender concern as a person feels for the welfare of his dearest relative^l. Were we to behold one who was dear to us in imminent danger, we should feel acutely for him: but we see millions perishing in their sins, and yet lay it not to heart, and are scarcely more grieved about them than if we had reason to believe them in a state of perfect safety. Far different is the manner in which we regard our own things. If we were doomed to suffer the loss but of a finger only, it would press with considerable weight upon our minds: but we can behold persons, on every side of us, going down to perdition, without making any serious effort to deliver them.]

^g 2 Cor. xi. 23—27.

ⁱ Acts xiii. 13. and xv. 38.

^k Isai. vi. 8.

^h Acts xx. 24.

^l γυναιως.

See then, here, what GROUND we have,

1. For inquiry—

[How has it been with us? What has been the state of our minds towards the Lord Jesus Christ? Have we found our own concerns swallowed up, as it were, in a concern for him and his glory? Can we adopt, even in the most qualified sense, that expression of the Psalmist, “The zeal of thine house has even consumed me^m!” Remember, I pray you, that every thing should be subordinated to Christ, and be regarded only as dung and dross in comparison of him. Our blessed Lord tells us, that “if we *hate* not father and mother, yea, and our own life also, in comparison of him, we cannot be his disciplesⁿ.” Surely, after such a declaration as this, we should examine our state with all diligence, and never rest till we can say, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.”]

2. For humiliation—

[Let us turn our eyes to our great Exemplar, the Lord Jesus Christ. “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich^o.” To this the Apostle particularly adverts, in the preceding context: “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross^p.” Here, you see, is our pattern. But what resemblance do we bear to him? The leaving of all the glory of heaven, the taking of our nature with all its sinless infirmities, the dying under the weight of our sins, even of the sins of the whole world, were not too great acts of self-denial for him to perform; and *that*, too, even for his enemies. But *we*, what have *we* done? What have we suffered, for the glory of Christ, and the salvation of men? Say, whether we all have not reason to blush and be ashamed at our extreme want of conformity to him in these respects?]

3. For watchfulness—

[Selfishness is an evil peculiarly subtle, and veils its own malignity under the most specious names and pretexts. We may see this in the persons who came to our Lord, professing

^m Ps. lxi. 9.

^o 2 Cor. viii. 9.

ⁿ Luke xiv. 26.

^p ver. 4—8.

a great regard for him, and a fixed determination to serve him. One said, "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest;" but was deterred from executing his purpose, when our Lord told him, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." Another, when bidden by our Lord to follow him, requested that this might be dispensed with for a season, that he might go home and bury his father. A third made great professions of his readiness to follow Christ; but desired, that he might first go home, and bid his friends farewell^a. To all of these our Lord gave such replies as were calculated to expose and counteract the delusions by which they were blinded. And were our excuses tried, as they will ere long be, by the same touchstone, how vain would they appear! Pleas of duty or affection are often brought forth to justify the secret backwardness which we feel to encounter difficulties for the Lord. But the mask will soon be taken off, and our selfishness will appear in all its naked deformity. Beware then, brethren, lest ye deceive your own souls; and, whilst the fidelity of others is questioned, let it be said of you, as it was of Timothy, "*Ye know the proof of him*^r." Let your whole life be a comment on that declaration of the Apostle, "None of us liveth to himself; and no man dieth unto himself; but whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's^s." Only take care that, in your experience, it be "Christ to live;" and you need never fear but that it shall be "gain to die^t."]

^a Luke ix. 57—60.^r ver. 22.^s Rom. xiv. 7, 8.^t Phil. i. 21.

MMCLI.

THE TRUE CHRISTIAN DELINEATED.

Phil. iii. 3. *We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.*

IT is much to be lamented that the nature of genuine Christianity is but little understood. An assent to the fundamental articles of our faith, and a conformity to certain rites and ceremonies, are thought sufficient grounds for concluding ourselves real Christians, notwithstanding we are plainly warned

by God himself, that religion does not consist in these things^a. Persons may be, and often are, very zealous advocates for the externals of religion, while they are altogether destitute of its life and power. Such were those whom St. Paul calls, not the sheep of Christ, but “dogs;” not saints, but “evil-workers;” not the circumcision, but, in a way of contempt, “the concision,” because all their piety consisted in a zeal for the cutting of the flesh. Against such persons he *thrice* enjoins us to “beware;” and then contrasts with theirs the character of the true Christian.

There are three discriminating points which distinguish the circumcision, or the true Christians, from all who are Christians only in name and profession :

I. They worship God in the Spirit—

[Many never bow their knees before God at all. What they are, they themselves shall judge. Others observe the form of prayer both in public and in private ; but their hearts are not engaged ; nor is there any difference in their frame, whether they confess their sins, or ask for blessings, or acknowledge benefits received. All their services are without life, and without devotion.

The true Christian, on the contrary, though not always in the same frame, “worships God in the Spirit,” that is, not only with the inmost affections of his soul, but through the direction and assistance of the Holy Ghost^b. If we could see him in his closet before God, we should often behold him bathed in tears, and with hands and eyes lifted up to heaven imploring mercy at the hands of God. His thanksgivings too are not an unmeaning compliment, but an heartfelt grateful acknowledgment, suited in a measure to the mercies he has received. He “pours out his soul before God^c,” and “stirs up himself to lay hold on God^d,” and says, like Jacob, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me^e.”

Let us examine to which of these classes we belong — — — and we may know infallibly what is our state before God.]

II. They rejoice in Christ Jesus—

[The world have their joys, such as they are, arising from the things of time and sense. Some know no happiness but in lewdness and intemperance. Others, moving either in a continual round of fashionable amusements, or in the pursuit

^a Rom. ii. 28, 29.

^b Jude, ver. 20. Rom. viii. 15, 26.

^c Ps. xlii. 4. 1 Sam. i. 15. ^d Isai. lxiv. 7. ^e Gen. xxxii. 26.

of wealth or honour, find all their pleasure in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. Others more rationally seek their happiness in the acquisition of knowledge. While others seem contented to move, like a horse in a mill, in the same round of daily occupation, without aiming at any thing further than an exemption from trouble, and an easy passage through life.

But the true Christian, while he is alive to all the joys that are possessed by others, *as far as they are pleasing to God, and profitable to his soul*, has joys of a far higher nature. He has felt his need of mercy, and has found mercy through Christ Jesus. Hence the very name of “Jesus is precious to him:” and the richest gratification he can possibly enjoy is, to contemplate the glory and excellency of his beloved. He does not indeed always feel the same delight in the Saviour; but his richest consolations and sublimest joys arise from this source, insomuch that all the pleasures of sense are nothing in his eyes in comparison of one hour’s fellowship with the Son of God^f. Indeed he would not wish to be happy when he is at a distance from his Lord: in such a state he would consider happiness rather a curse than a blessing. But in whatever state he be with respect to temporal things, a sight of his adorable Saviour will render him completely happy^g.

Here again let us inquire into our own experience. We need no surer test of our state than that before us. Let us examine ourselves with care — — — and “the Lord give us understanding in all things!”]

III. They have no confidence in the flesh—

[The ungodly world, if in prosperity, “make gold their confidence^h,” and “trust in their uncertain richesⁱ.” If, on the other hand, they be in adversity, they look no higher than to their own exertions, or than to their earthly friends to deliver them. The same creature-confidence pervades all their spiritual concerns: they “lean altogether on an arm of flesh,” and trust in their own goodness or repentance to recommend them to God, and their own strength and resolution to fulfil his will.

The true Christian is the very reverse of this. We say not that he has no bias towards these evils, for his old nature still remains within him: but his views with respect to these things are altogether altered; and, though he neglects not any means which are proper to be used, he trusts in God only to maintain his prosperity, or to restore it when he has been pleased to afflict him with any calamity. With respect to his

^f Ps. iv. 6.

^h Job xxxi. 24.

^g 1 Pet. i. 8.

ⁱ 1 Tim. vi. 17.

soul also he has no hope but in God. To the free mercy of God in Christ Jesus he trusts for every blessing. In the atoning sacrifice and prevailing intercession of Jesus he confides, as the ground of his acceptance with his reconciled God. On the all-powerful grace of Christ he relies, as that which alone can enable him to subdue his enemies, and to serve his God. Feeling that he is in himself ignorant, guilty, polluted, and enslaved, he renounces all self-confidence, and makes Jesus his wisdom, his righteousness, his sanctification, and redemption.

Surely there can be no difficulty in ascertaining our proper character, if only we will make this point also a matter of serious self-examination — — —]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who, according to these distinctions, must be considered as devoid of real Christianity—

[Remember who it is that cuts you off from the number of true Christians: it is not man, but God, even that God who will judge you in the last day according to his own word. O continue not in such a state; but seek that circumcision of the heart which, though condemned by men, shall ultimately have praise of God.]

2. Those who have reason from the foregoing remarks to hope that they are Christians indeed—

[What reason have you to bless God for the mercies that have been vouchsafed to you! But remember, it is not by past experience merely you are to judge, but by the continued habit of your mind. Rest not satisfied with any thing you have known; lest you “begin in the Spirit, and end in the flesh.” The text does not characterize the Christian by what he has done, but by what he yet does: and therefore “press forward, forgetting what is behind, and reaching forth unto what is before:” and “as you have received how to walk and to please God, so endeavour to abound more and more.”]

MMCLII.

THE EXCELLENCY OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST.

Phil. iii. 7, 8. *What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.*

MANKIND in general are agitated by various and contending passions, while the true Christian enjoys

serenity and composure : he is indeed tempted like others to gratify his corrupt nature ; but he has one supreme desire which overcomes and regulates all the rest. He is compared to a wise merchant, who having found a pearl of great price, sells all that he has and buys it. Whatever stands in competition with the welfare of his soul will be renounced by him ; and, with the Apostle, he will “ count all things but loss for Christ.” To impress this truth more deeply on our minds, we shall consider,

I. What things Paul had which were gain to him—

Amongst all the sons of men there never was any in whom so many and so great excellencies combined, as in the Apostle Paul—

[In respect of *civil distinctions*, he was highly dignified by *birth*, being “ an Hebrew of the Hebrews^a.” He was also eminent for *learning*, having been “ brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and profited above many his equals^b.”

Nor was he less distinguished in respect of *moral qualities*. Such was the *strictness of his principles*, that he joined himself to the Pharisees, the strictest sect among the Jews^c. His *probity of conduct* was irreproachable ; for he had “ lived in all good conscience before God from his very youth^d.” His *zeal* also, though not according to knowledge, was peculiarly earnest ; insomuch that, touching the righteousness of the law, he was blameless ; and he opposed the Gospel to the uttermost, because he thought it subverted the law of Moses^e.

But however illustrious he was as a Jew, he was still more so as a Christian and an Apostle. His *religious attainments* were never equalled by any mere man. His *exertions* in the cause of Christ surpassed those of all the other Apostles^f. He also *suffered* more than any for the sake of the Gospel^g ; yea, he was “ in deaths oft,” “ not counting his life dear to him, so that he might finish his course with joy.”]

These things might well be accounted gain to him—

[His *civil distinctions* might recommend him to his countrymen, and augment his influence^h. And though he would not make a parade of his learning, he found it useful on some

^a Phil. iii. 5.

^b Acts xxii. 3. Gal. i. 14.

^c Acts xxvi. 5.

^d Acts xxiii. 1.

^e Phil. iii. 6. Acts xxvi. 9, 10.

^f 1 Cor. xv. 10.

^g 2 Cor. xi. 23—28.

^h 2 Cor. xi. 21, 22. Acts xxii. 25—29.

occasionsⁱ. His *moral qualities* also might well be valuable in his sight: for though no strictness of principles, probity of conduct, or zeal for religion, could recommend him God, yet they were ample testimonies of the integrity of his heart. His *religious attainments* were still more deserving estimation; for though not meritorious in the sight of God, they tended greatly to the glory of God, and the edification of the church, and were undoubted evidences of his meetness for heaven. Well therefore might he rejoice, as he did, in the testimony of a good conscience^k.]

But he possessed something of incomparably greater value than these things, as will appear, if we inquire,

II. What that was which he preferred before them—

The Apostle had happily attained the knowledge of Christ—

[A mere general uninteresting knowledge of Christ would not have been very high in his esteem: that, which he possessed, was *distinct* and *experimental*. He saw Christ as God, equal with the Father, though appearing in the form of a servant^l: he beheld him sustaining various offices in the economy of redemption, and executing them for his people's good. He beheld him as the "*Christ*," "anointed by the Spirit to preach glad tidings to the meek;" as "*Jesus*," the person commissioned to "save men from their sins;" and as "*the Lord*," who was constituted the living Head, the Supreme Governor, and the righteous Judge of his redeemed people.

But not even this *distinct* knowledge would have been valued by him, if it had not also been *experimental*. The expressions following the text respecting his "winning Christ, and being found in him, and knowing him in the power of his resurrection," evidently imply that he tasted a sweetness, and felt a peculiar efficacy, in this knowledge. He found by happy experience that he had communion with Christ in his offices^m. He saw Christ not merely as a Prophet, a Priest, or a King, but as that very Teacher who had opened his eyes; that very Lamb that had taken away his sins; that very Head, to whom he himself was vitally united, and from whom he derived all his supplies of grace and strength. Hence in speaking of Christ he calls him, "Christ Jesus my Lord."]

ⁱ Thrice he quoted the Greek poets in confirmation of the truth: and took advantage of his knowledge of the Greek language to oppose more successfully the heathen idolatry. Acts xvii. 23.

^k 2 Cor. i. 12.

^l Phil. ii. 6, 7.

^m 1 John i. 3.

This it was which he esteemed beyond all other things—

[In comparison of this, his *civil distinctions*, his *moral qualities*, and even his *religious attainments*, appeared to him “as dung and dross.” He clearly perceived that none of those things could ever justify him at the tribunal of God; and that, if ever he were saved, he must “be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ:” hence he accounted his former gain to be not only dung, but “*loss*,” that is, not only useless, but prejudicial, if it diverted his eyes from Christ, or weakened his dependence upon him. Nor did he entertain the smallest doubt respecting the justness of his views; but repeated his assertions in the strongest and most decisive terms, “yea, *doubtless*, and I count *all* things but loss.” Nor did his confidence proceed from inexperience; for repeating the same thing a third time, he adds, “for whom *I have suffered* the loss of *all* things, and *do count* them but dung.”]

The propriety of his judgment will be seen by considering,

III. The grounds of his preference—

There was an “excellency” in that knowledge that far surpassed every thing else—

The *object* of it was truly wonderful—

[Who can think of an incarnate God, bearing the sins of his rebellious creatures, and not stand amazed? Who can view the wisdom, power, and goodness of God, as exhibited in the face of a dying Saviour, and not confess, that “great is the mystery of godliness?” The consideration of this alone had been a very sufficient ground for his declaration in the text.]

The *effects* of it transcend all that eye hath seen, or ear heard, or heart conceived—

[The knowledge of this adorable Saviour *will comfort us under all troubles*. None ever endured greater bodily trials than Paul; yet “none of them could move him; and he was exceeding joyful in all his tribulation.” The trials of his soul were far greater; yet while he was groaning under their utmost weight, a view of Christ instantly turned his mourning into thanksgivings and the voice of melody: and, on another occasion, while he was cruelly buffeted by Satan, an answer

ⁿ Acts xx. 24. 2 Cor. vii. 4.

^o Rom. vii. 24, 25.

of peace from Christ enabled him to glory in his infirmities, and even to take pleasure in the most complicated distresses^p.

Moreover, this knowledge *will transform the soul into the image of God*. Before his conversion, his zeal shewed itself in persecuting unto death the greatest friends both of God and man: how unlike the conduct of Jesus, who died for his very enemies! But when converted to the faith, he had "continual sorrow in his heart on account of his brethren's obstinacy, and wished himself even accursed from Christ for their sake^q." He, like his Divine Master, was willing to die for his enemies, and rejoiced exceedingly in the prospect of being sacrificed for the good of the Church^r. To what can we ascribe this change, but to the knowledge of Christ^s? And if to *that*, what reason had he to prize it!

Lastly, this knowledge *will avail for the salvation of all who possess it*. Paul, though he thought himself "alive" before his conversion, found at last that he was really "dead^t:" but after his conversion, he was no longer dead, either in reality, or in his own apprehension: he frequently speaks with the fullest assurance respecting the safety of his state^u; and teaches all who know Christ to expect with confidence a crown of righteousness in the day of judgment^x.

On such grounds we must not only approve the Apostle's judgment, but account it madness to differ from him.]

APPLICATION—

[All of us possess something which we account gain. Some are more elevated by birth or fortune, others by education and learning: some value themselves on their moral qualities; others on their religious attainments: let us freely acknowledge the *gain* which may be found in these things^y: but let us never forget that there is *ONE* thing of infinitely greater value than all those together, and for which our gain must be accounted loss. To have a *distinct experimental* knowledge of Christ, to be able to say, "He has loved *me*, and given himself for *me*," is of more value than ten thousand worlds: it is that, and that alone, which can ever comfort, sanctify, or save the soul. Let us then seek to know Christ and him crucified, and to "grow in the knowledge of him," till we "see him as we are seen, and know him as we are known."]

^p 2 Cor. xii. 7—10. ^q Rom. ix. 2, 3.

^r Phil. ii. 17, 18.

^s 2 Cor. v. 14. and iii. 18.

^t Rom. vii. 9.

^u 2 Cor. v. 1—4. ^x 2 Tim. iv. 8.

^y If this be the subject of a *Commemoration Sermon*, the advantages arising from the institution may be stated, together with just acknowledgments both to God and the benefactors.

MMCLIII.

CHRIST, GAIN TO THE BELIEVER.

Phil. iii. 8, 9. *For whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him; not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.*

RESPECTING doctrines, as mere subjects of controversy, we need not be anxious; it is as influential principles that we are called to examine and maintain them: and, in this view, we cannot too “earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints.” That which is, above all other subjects, important to the soul, demands our attention at this time: and the Apostle’s zeal, in relation to it, shews with what holy jealousy we should conduct our investigation of it, and with what determination of heart we should hold fast that which shall approve itself as the truth of God. The two points to be noticed are,

I. The way of salvation, as stated by the Apostle—

He speaks of being “found in Christ,” clothed in a righteousness not his own. Let us consider what he means.

The Lord Jesus Christ has wrought out a righteousness for sinful man—

[He has come from heaven for that purpose: he has assumed our nature, that he might suffer and obey for us: for us he has suffered the full penalty due to our sins; and obeyed in all respects that law which we have violated. All this he has done as our Substitute and Surety; so that if the law require its penalties to be enforced, we can reply, that we have already sustained them in the person of our Lord: and if it require perfect obedience to its commands, we can reply, that we have already obeyed it in the person of our Lord: so that it has no ground whereon to condemn us: on the contrary, supposing us to be “found in Christ,” and to be “one with Christ,” which every true believer is, we may look up to God with confidence; having a righteousness of his own appointment; a righteousness commensurate with all the demands of

law and justice; a righteousness wherein we may stand before him without spot or blemish.]

This righteousness is to be apprehended by faith—

[In no other manner can it be apprehended. It exists not in us, but in the Lord Jesus Christ; whose it is, and by whom it is imputed to us; and who is therefore called, “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS^a.” If it be said, that, though it is Christ’s righteousness, and not ours, we yet may earn by our good works an interest in it; I answer, that we may as well earn salvation itself, as earn an interest in that righteousness whereby we are saved. The effect will be the same in either case: salvation will be of works, and not of grace; and every person who shall be saved, will have a ground of glorying in himself, as having purchased that whereby he is saved. But the Gospel salvation utterly excludes glorying^b: and “it is by faith, on purpose that it may be by grace^c.” In truth, any attempt to purchase it would utterly make it void; and, however glorious it be in itself, it would profit us nothing^d. The Apostle, in our text, carefully excludes all his own righteousness from bearing any part in his salvation, and declares his reliance to be only and exclusively on that righteousness which is of God through faith in Christ. We say, then, respecting this righteousness, that it is “*the righteousness of God* :” it is the “*righteousness of God without the law* :” it is “*the righteousness to which both the law and the prophets bear witness* :” it is “*the righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ* : and it is *unto all, and upon all, them that believe*^e.”]

All who are united to Christ by faith, shall be saved by it—

[By faith we are united unto Christ; and become one in law with him, even as a wife becomes one with her husband: and exactly as “he was made sin for us who knew no sin; so we, who had no righteousness of our own, are by faith made the righteousness of God in him^f.” There is no exception of persons: all, whether Jews or Gentiles, and whether their sins have been of greater or less enormity, shall be equally accepted, if only they believe in him: for “his blood cleanseth from all sin^g,” and “all who believe, shall be justified from all things^h.”]

Such being the way of salvation, as stated by the Apostle, let us notice,

II. His feelings in relation to it—

^a Jer. xxiii. 6.

^b Rom. iii. 27.

^c Rom. iv. 16.

^d Gal. v. 2—4.

^e Rom. iii. 21, 22.

^f 2 Cor. v. 21.

^g 1 John i. 7.

^h Acts xiii. 39.

To obtain an interest in the righteousness of Christ was his supreme desire—

[If any man who ever lived might have had a righteousness of his own, the Apostle Paul might. His conduct previous to his conversion, though mistaken, was yet as exemplary, and as strictly conformable to the dictates of his conscience, as any man's could beⁱ. And, subsequent to his conversion, his whole soul was so entirely given up to his God and Saviour Jesus Christ, that he was not in any respect "a whit behind the very chiefest Apostles." Yet, so conscious was he of the defects which accompanied his best services, that he disclaimed utterly all dependence on his own works, and desired to "be found in Christ; not having his own righteousness, which was of the law, but the righteousness which was of God through faith in Christ." And why did he desire this, but because he knew that no other righteousness than that of Christ could ever justify him before God? He was perfectly convinced of this; so convinced, that when the Apostle Peter acted in a way that was likely to bring this truth into doubt, he reprimanded him openly, before the whole Church^k. Nay more; so strenuous was he in vindicating this truth, that he denounced a curse even against an angel from heaven, if one should be found ignorant or impious enough to maintain any doctrine that was opposed to it^l. He knew that the salvation of every human being was bound up in it; and therefore he would "give place, no, not for an hour," to any created intelligence in relation to it^m.]

In comparison of this, he regarded all other things with the utmost contempt—

[All other things "he counted but dung, that he might win Christ." A stronger expression he could not have used. He not only willingly sacrificed, but held in perfect abhorrence, every thing that should stand in competition with an interest in the Redeemer's righteousness. And he spake not this as a sanguine man, who knew not what difference might take place in his mind, when he should be put to the trial. No; he had been brought to the test; and had actually "suffered the loss of all things," and yet counted them but dung. He had actually experienced what he was now affirming; and he gave this testimony with an assurance that would not admit of a moment's doubt. He was like a man, who, "having found the pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it;" and never regretted for an instant the sacrifice he had made. The terms which he here uses in

ⁱ ver. 4—6.^k Gal. ii. 11—16.^l Gal. i. 8, 9.^m Gal. ii. 5.

opposition to each other, "*loss* and *gain*," are such as may lead us to a yet more appropriate illustrationⁿ; that of a shipwrecked mariner, who as Paul himself advised, casts out the tackling, and the very food from the ship, in order to preserve the lives of those who are on board^o. He takes no account of that which he loses: he is intent only on his gain: and, if he may but secure safety to the crew, he is content. Thus the Apostle, having *gained* Christ, considered as no better than dung all that he had parted with to secure so rich a portion.]

ADDRESS—

1. The worldly Christian—

[What a contrast is there between the Apostle Paul and you! He counted the whole world but dung for Christ; and you count (what shall I say?) Christ himself as of no value, in comparison of the world. The things of this world you *will* have, whatever you may be necessitated to pay for them. Pardon of sin, peace of conscience, yea, and all prospects of eternal glory, you will sacrifice for the things of time and sense. Your own soul, and the Lord Jesus Christ, are held cheap, in comparison of some fleeting vanity. The language of your heart is, 'Let me *gain* pleasure, riches, honour; and then it signifies nothing what I may *lose*.' Judge ye, my brethren, whether these desires of yours can be right. Verily, either Paul must have been a wild, deluded enthusiast, or you are unworthy to "name the name of Christ." Reflect, I beseech you, ere it be too late: and choose, not those "things which perish with the using," but "that good part which shall never be taken away from you."]

2. The self-righteous Christian—

[And what greater resemblance have *you* to this Holy Apostle? *He* utterly discarded all hope in his own righteousness, that he might be found in Christ; but *you* are holding fast your own righteousness, and accounting the idea of being saved by another's righteousness as a dangerous delusion. This pride of yours is harder to subdue than any corporeal lust. It was this which caused the Pharisees to reject the Saviour. "They would not submit to the righteousness of God." Hence *they* perished, whilst millions of idolatrous and ungodly Gentiles embraced the Gospel. I pray you, think what you are doing; and before you determine to persist in your self-righteous views, see whether your righteousness be better than that of Paul. He had no slight ground of glorying, *as a Jew*: but

ⁿ ἐζημιώθην, κερδήσω.

^o Acts xxvii. 19, 38.

what had he *as a Christian*? There he was surpassed by none: none ever *did* more for their Lord than he; none ever *suffered* more: yet could he find nothing in himself wherein to trust, and therefore he sought to be found in Christ alone. Thus also *must* you do: nor, if you refuse to do it, can you ever behold the face of God in peace.]

3. The lukewarm Christian—

[Many, alas! embrace the principles of the Gospel *as principles*, but never feel that interest in them which the Apostle did. They have suffered no loss for Christ, because they have never manifested such love to him as condemns an ignorant and unbelieving world. Had Noah never built an ark, he would never have been made such an object of derision as he was to the antediluvian world; and, if Lot had never “vexed his righteous soul with the ungodly deeds” of those who lived in Sodom, he would never have incurred, as he did, their contemptuous displeasure. You too, if you followed the Lord fully, would find, that the offence of the cross is not ceased: but that now, as formerly, “they who are born after the flesh will persecute those who are born after the Spirit.” In a word, if you valued and served the Lord Jesus Christ as the Apostle Paul did, you would surely be called to make some sacrifices for him: for “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” Deceive not yourselves, my dear brethren: it is not a divided heart that Jesus will accept: you must feel “the constraining influence of his love,” and be animated by it to “live to Him who died for you, and rose again.” Then only will you be approved of him, when you “give yourselves wholly to him in body, soul, and spirit.” The lukewarm follower he will cast off with abhorrence^p. And let me ask, Is this unreasonable? Did he give up the glory of heaven for you; and will you account much of any sacrifice you may be called to make for him? Did he endure the curse of the law for you; and will you grudge to suffer any thing for him? Be in earnest, then: first, to form a proper estimate of Christ; and, next, to give up every thing that may stand in competition with him. So shall his righteousness be yours, and his glory be given you for an everlasting possession.]

MMCLIV.

THE POWER OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION.

Phil. iii. 10. *That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection.*

MANY think that religion is not an object of choice, but rather of compulsion and constraint: and hence they frequently suggest to the godly, that the measure of piety to which they aspire is not necessary. But true Christians do not regard God as a task-master, standing over them with a rod; but as a Father, delighting in the happiness of his children: and they desire to act the part of dutiful children, fulfilling his will to the utmost of their power. They are not satisfied with "winning Christ, and being found in him:" they would serve him, and honour him, and resemble him: and, like St. Paul, they desire to "know him, and the power of his resurrection."

To elucidate this truth, I will shew,

I. What is meant by "the power of Christ's resurrection"—

As the death of Christ has an efficacy, so his resurrection also has an influence,

1. On our justification—

[The death of Christ was not *of itself* sufficient. Under the law, the high-priest must not only offer sacrifice, but must take the blood of that sacrifice, and enter with it into the holy of holies, and sprinkle it there upon the mercy-seat and before the mercy-seat, and offer incense also there: nor, till these things were done, was he authorized to deliver his blessing to the people^a. So the Lord Jesus must not only offer himself a sacrifice for sin; but must enter into heaven with his own blood, there to present it, in our behalf, before his God and Father^b: nor without this would his work have been complete. Hence our justification is not only ascribed to his resurrection in conjunction with his death^c, but even in preference to his death^d; since it was the completion of that which by his death was only begun.]

^a Lev. xvi. 11—15.

^c Rom. iv. 25.

^b Heb. ix. 24.

^d Rom. viii. 34.

2. On our sanctification—

[None but the Spirit of God can sanctify the soul. But the Spirit would never have been given, if Jesus had not risen^e. At his ascension to heaven, he received the Holy Spirit as the promise of the Father^f, and received him for the express purpose of sending him down into the hearts of his people^g. That he might begin and carry on his work in their hearts, he ascended to heaven; as it is said, "To this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be the Lord both of the dead and living^h."]]

3. On our exaltation to glory—

[If Christ had not risen, neither should we have risenⁱ: for he burst the bands of death for us, and thereby destroyed its power to retain us under its dominion. He, in his resurrection, was "the first-fruits;" and his people will be the harvest^k. Whilst he was yet with his Disciples, he pointed out to them the connexion between his removal from them, and their exaltation to heaven: "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you: and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also^l." In a word, "he was the Forerunner" of his people: and all of them shall follow him in their season^m.]

Let me now proceed to shew,

II. What it is to "know Christ" as exercising this power—

It is not a speculative knowledge that is here spoken of, but a knowledge that is practical and experimental, and that enters into the very essence of true and vital religion. To "know Christ" as the Apostle desired to know him, we must have such views of him in his risen state as shall operate,

1. To confirm our faith—

[Certainly the proper ground of faith is God's revealed word: but an experience of that word in our own souls gives a degree of assurance that never is, or can be, attained without. I believe, from the testimony of Scripture, that Jesus is an almighty and all-sufficient Saviour. But I find, from the peace which he has infused into my soul, and the power he

^e John xvi. 7.

^f Acts ii. 38, 39.

^g Ps. lxviii. 18.

^h Rom. xiv. 9.

ⁱ 1 Cor. xv. 21.

^k 1 Cor. xv. 20.

^l John xiv. 2, 3.

^m Heb. vi. 20.

has given me to mortify my lusts, and from the delight which he has enabled me to feel in communion with himself, that there is a reality in the Gospel, which a mere speculative believer has no conception of. A man, who has heard men's testimony respecting the existence and influence of the sun, may be fully assured that such an orb does really exist. But the man who beholds its light, and feels its genial rays, will have a widely different conception of it. The former may argue better respecting it; but it is the latter alone who is really competent to appreciate it aright. And, in like manner, he alone knows Christ fully, who knows him experimentally, by the actual enjoyment of him in his own soul.]

2. To animate our hope—

[There is "a full assurance of hope," which he alone who knows Christ experimentally can possess. I see him dying for me; risen for me; interceding for me; and carrying on his work within me. Can I doubt his love, his power, his grace, his truth, and faithfulness? Has he done so much for me, in order to forsake me at last, and to abandon me to deeper ruin? Has he done so much for me when I was living in direct hostility to him; and will he leave me, now that I seek his face, and desire to glorify his name? No: I *can* trust him, and I *will*. Well do I know my own sinfulness: but I know also the virtue of his blood. I know my weakness also: but I know also the sufficiency of his grace to save me even to the uttermost. I know, too, the treachery of my heart: but I know how sure his promise is; and that "where he has begun a good work, he will carry it on, and perfect it to the endⁿ." And therefore will I "hope, even against hope," and "hold fast my confidence firm unto the end."ⁿ]

3. To sanctify and transform the soul—

[I see my Lord. I call to mind what he has designed in all the wonders of his love. He desires to have "a holy and peculiar people, zealous of good works." Now, shall I counteract all his gracious designs? Shall I crucify him afresh, by continuing in my sins? Shall I not rather desire him to accomplish in me "all the good pleasure of his goodness;" and to "sanctify me throughout, in body, soul, and spirit?" Yes, for him will I live; and to him will I devote all the powers of my soul. There was nothing which he declined to do or suffer for me: and there is nothing which, with his help, I will not do and suffer for him.]

Thus we SEE,

1. What a practical thing religion is—

ⁿ Phil. i. 6.

[Had there been any one truth in it that was merely speculative, methinks the doctrine of the resurrection might have been supposed to come under that particular class. But it has been seen how extremely practical this doctrine is; not merely as affording *ground* for faith and love, but as generating in the soul all that is amiable and praiseworthy. If then, any one object to religion, as consisting in abstract notions, or in any peculiar tenets, let its true nature be remembered, and its intrinsic excellence be extolled — — —]

2. That, in the practice of religion, the true Christian will know no limits on this side of absolute perfection—

Of the Apostle's attainments none can doubt: yet did *he* desire to know Christ, and the power of his resurrection, as much as if he had lived an entire stranger to piety even to that very hour. And so will every true Christian, like one in a race, forget all the ground that he has passed, and be intent only on that which is before him: nor will he ever be content, till he is "holy as God himself is holy, and perfect as his Father which is in heaven is perfect." Then only will he be fully "satisfied, when he shall awake up with the perfect likeness of his God^o."]

° Ps. xvii. 15.

MMCLV.

HOLY AMBITION ENCOURAGED.

Phil. iii. 13—15. *Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded.*

TRUE religion affords such perfect satisfaction to the mind, that from the time we become possessed of it, we lose our relish for other things, and feel ourselves at rest, as having attained the summit of our ambition^a. But though we cease to hunger or thirst after the vanities of time and sense, our appetite for spiritual blessings is quickened: nor can the richest acquisitions content us, as long as there remains any

^a John vi. 35.

thing further to be enjoyed. This was St. Paul's experience. He had been apprehended and arrested, as it were, by the Lord Jesus, in order that he might be made to possess all the treasures of grace and glory: and, from that hour, he could never be satisfied with any thing short of the full enjoyment of them^b. And, while he cherished this holy ambition in his own bosom, he recommended it earnestly to all others.

There are, in the words before us, two things which he recommends from his own example :

I. An humble sense of our present attainments—

St. Paul, though so eminent, entertained but low thoughts of himself—

[Never was there a man more distinguished than he, whether we consider in general his love to God^c and man^d, or examine the particular graces that adorned his soul^e. He not only was not inferior to any other Apostle^f, but he laboured more abundantly than they all^g. Yet, from an impartial view of himself, as compared with the requirements of God's law, and the example of his Divine Master, he was constrained to confess that he had not yet attained that measure either of knowledge or of holiness, which it was his duty, and his privilege, to possess. This, I say, he found from an exact computation^h, and has recorded it for the instruction of the Church in all ages.]

In this respect he proposes himself to us as an example—

[The word “perfect,” in the close of the text, is not to be understood in the strictest sense, (for then it would contradict what he had before saidⁱ,) but as signifying that degree of maturity at which the generality of Christians arrive^k. To persons of this description he says, “Be thus minded:” and surely it is impossible not to feel the propriety of the exhortation. Let any one of us, even the best amongst us, compare himself with the perfect law of God, or with the spotless

^b ver. 12. ^c 2 Cor. v. 14. Acts xx. 24. and xxi. 13.

^d Rom. ix. 1—3. Phil. ii. 17.

^e Sympathy, 2 Cor. xi. 29 ; Contentment, Phil. iv. 11, 12 ; Deadness to the world, Gal. vi. 14 ; Industry, Rom. xv. 19 ; Self-denial, 1 Cor. ix. 15.

^f 2 Cor. xi. 5. and xii. 11.

^g 1 Cor. xv. 10.

^h λογίζομαι.

ⁱ ver. 12.

^k 1 Cor. ii. 6. and xiv. 20. and Eph. iv. 13.

example of our Lord, and will he not find in himself deficiencies without number? Let him even compare himself with Paul, a man of like passions with ourselves, and will he not appear a dwarf, a very child in comparison of him? Let him examine himself with respect to every Christian grace, and see whether he do not fall very far short of that bright pattern? Well then may all of us confess, that “we have not yet apprehended that for which we have been apprehended of Christ Jesus.”]

This however is not to discourage us, but to stimulate us to,

II. A diligent pursuit of higher attainments—

Glorious was the ardour with which the Apostle was animated in his high calling—

[He considered himself as “called by a reconciled God” to enter the lists in the Christian race, and as now actually contending for the prize. Much of his ground had he already passed over; but like the racers in the Olympic games, he “forgot what was behind,” and was mindful only of that which yet remained for him to do. He saw the prize in full view, and strained every nerve¹ in order to obtain it: and the nearer he approached the goal, the more earnestly did he “press forward,” desiring nothing but to “finish his course with joy.” This was “the one thing which he did.” Nothing else occupied his mind, nothing else was deemed worthy of one moment’s attention. Nothing could, in his apprehension, be lost, if that prize were gained; nor any thing gained, if that prize were lost.]

In this way he exhorts us also to prosecute the great concerns of our souls—

[The same prize which was set before him is held up to us also: and we are called by God to run for it. It may be that we have both done and suffered much for God already: but we must not think of any thing that is passed (except for the purpose of humbling ourselves, or of glorifying God) we must be intent only on present duty, and engage in it with all our might. To get forward must be our constant uniform endeavour. It is “the *one thing* needful.” As persons running in a race find no time for loitering or diversion, but distinguish themselves from mere spectators by the exertions they make; so must we manifest to all around us that we have but one pursuit, with which we are determined that nothing shall interfere, and which we will never relax, till we have reached the goal.]

¹ ἐπεκτεινόμενος.

This subject is of peculiar USE,

1. For reproof—

[How are they condemned *who have never yet begun the Christian race!* Do they expect to win the prize without running for it? This cannot be: “the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent must take it by force.” Still more are they condemned *who would discourage others that are engaged in the contest.* Are they “like-minded” with the Apostle, who are constantly endeavouring to damp the ardour which they will not emulate? Nor are they less worthy of reproof who have *relaxed their diligence in the ways of God.* To such Paul says, “Ye did run well; who hath hindered you^m? Yes; inquire diligently who or what hath hindered you: for you had better be stripped of all that you possess, than be impeded by it in your Christian course. Shake off then the thick clay from your feetⁿ: put aside the garment that obstructs your progress^o: mortify the flesh that pleads for indulgence^p: and “run with patience the race that is set before you.”]

2. For encouragement—

[Some perhaps are faint, and ready almost to give up the contest. But behold the prize: will not *that* repay? And is not the attainment of it certain, if you hold on your way^q? Yea more, shall not your strength be renewed, if only you wait upon your God^r? In a few more steps you will reach the goal: and will you stop when the prize is already, as it were, in your hands? O press forward: follow the Apostle: endure to the end; and receive “the crown of glory that fadeth not away.”]

^m Gal. v. 7. ⁿ Hab. ii. 6.

^o Heb. xii. 1. ἐνπερίστατον ἁμαρτίαν; See Beza's note on those words.

^p 1 Cor. ix. 24—27. ^q Matt. xxiv. 13. ^r Isai. xl. 29—31.

MMCLVI.

OF FOLLOWING GOOD EXAMPLES.

Phil. iii. 17, 20. *Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample . . . For our conversation is in heaven.*

GREAT is the force of example, either to vitiate or improve the morals of those around us. There are few, even of real Christians, who do not, in some

considerable degree, yield to its influence. The church at Philippi was, on the whole, distinguished for its attainments: yet even there, hypocrisy was found, and error had its advocates. The example of some worldly and sensual professors was likely to prove extremely injurious: while therefore the Apostle declares his grief occasioned by their misconduct, he exhorts the Church to unite in following rather the example that he had set them, and to notice with approbation all who conducted themselves agreeably to his advice.

The words that are in verses 18 and 19, being included in a parenthesis, those which are united in the text are properly connected with each other. In discoursing on them, we shall consider,

I. The Apostle's example—

St. Paul considered himself as a citizen of heaven^a—

[To be a citizen of Rome was deemed a high honour; and it was an honour which Paul possessed by virtue of his being a native of Tarsus, on which city this privilege had been conferred^b. But Paul's name was enrolled in a more glorious city, even in heaven itself^c. He belonged to the society of saints and angels, who were united under Christ, their common head^d: and he had a communion with them in all their honours, their interests, and their enjoyments^e.]

In the exercise of his rights, he had his daily converse in heaven—

[As a person is daily conversant with that society to which he belongs, maintaining fellowship with them, and ordering his life according to their rules, so the Apostle lived, as it were, in heaven: his thoughts and affections were there continually: and he was emulating those around the throne by his constant endeavours to glorify God, and by walking habitually in the light of his countenance.]

While he mentions his example, he shews us,

II. The use that we should make of it—

We should imitate him ourselves—

[We are already joined to the society in heaven^f, provided we be united unto Christ by faith: and it behoves us to

^a Πολίτευμα ἡμῶν might have been translated *our citizenship*.

^b Acts xxii. 28.

^c Luke x. 20.

^d Eph. i. 10. and iii. 15.

^e Eph. ii. 6.

^f Heb. xii. 22, 23.

“walk worthy of our high calling.” Though we are *in* the world, we are not to be *of* it. “We have here no continuing city:” we are to be in this world as pilgrims only and sojourners: we must ever consider ourselves as strangers and foreigners, who, though living on earth are indeed fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God^g. If we were travelling in a foreign land, we should regard the concerns of that land rather as objects of curiosity, than as matters in which we felt any deep interest: whereas the affairs of our own country, where our estates were situated, and our relations lived, would be regarded by us as matters of great moment. Thus should we be indifferent, as it were, to all the vanities of this life, and be wholly intent on our spiritual and eternal interests. We should be maintaining communion with our Head in heaven^h, and growing up into a meetness for the exercises and enjoyments of the invisible world.]

We should also “mark those who” do imitate him—

[All of us should uniteⁱ in following his example, and emulate each other in his holy employment. And, when any make higher attainments than ourselves we should not be ashamed to imitate them: *we should observe^k particularly what it is wherein they excel us, and how it is that they have been enabled to outstrip us.* We should endeavour to encourage them; and together with them to press forward towards perfection^l.]

We may make USE of this subject,

1. For reproof—

[How widely do the greater part of Christians differ from the Apostle! Nor is it only the profane, or the formal, that are condemned by his example, but even the godly also. Let all of us then be ashamed of the low sense we entertain of our privileges, and of the coldness with which we prosecute our eternal interests. Let us seek to have our views and dispositions more conformed to those of the saints of old; that at the second coming of our Lord we may behold him both with confidence and joy^m.]

2. For encouragement—

[It is not to Apostles that these attainments are confined: they were common to many others in the Church at Philippi, who, together with the Apostle, are proposed as patterns unto us. Let none then imagine that this blessed state is beyond their reach; but rather let all aspire after it, as the one object

^g Eph. ii. 19.

^h 1 John i. 3.

ⁱ Συμμιμηταί.

^k Σκοπεῖτε.

^l Prov. xv. 24.

^m ver. 20, 21. with 1 John ii. 28.

of their ambitionⁿ. Let all seek to know what a gloriously rich inheritance^o they are even now permitted to enjoy; and, having by faith gained access into this grace, let them stand in it, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God^p.]

ⁿ ver. 13, 14.

^o Eph. i. 18.

^p Rom. v. 2.

MMCLVII.

A WARNING TO THE EARTHLY-MINDED.

Phil. iii. 18, 19. *Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.*

NOTWITHSTANDING the utter extinction of vital godliness from the heart of man, through the introduction of sin into the world, there remain within him some principles of goodness, weakened indeed, but still operative and lively. Among these we may notice humanity and compassion, which often work in the breasts of the unregenerate, so as even to shame those who are endued with a principle of true religion. There is, however, one essential difference between this disposition as it is exercised by unconverted men, and the same as cultivated by the godly: in the former, it extends no further than to the temporal condition of mankind; but in the latter, it terminates chiefly on their spiritual and eternal state. Hence we frequently see both Prophets and Apostles expressing with tears their concern for the souls of those around them. In the passage before us, St. Paul was filled with the tenderest emotions of pity, while he beheld the state of many in the Christian Church, whose character and end he most pathetically describes.

In illustrating his statement, we shall consider,

I. The lamentable state of some professors—

St. James speaks of a principle that is “earthly

sensual, devilish^a,” and such is that, by which too many, who profess godliness, are actuated.

1. “Their belly is their god”—

[By “the belly,” we understand the sensual appetite^b: and to make “a god” of it, is to yield ourselves up to its dominion. And must we go to heathen countries to find persons of this description? are not “many” such to be found in the Christian Church? Many, alas! are addicted to gluttony, to drunkenness, to whoredom: and among those who are free from these gross excesses, how many are there who have no higher end of life than to consult their own ease and pleasure, and whose labours in all their younger years, are with a view to provide these very enjoyments for them in the decline of life! What is this but to put the gratification of their sensual appetite in the place of God, whose will should be the only *rule*, and whose glory, the ultimate *end*, of all their actions?]

2. “They glory in their shame”—

[Whatever proceeds from a corrupt principle, whether it be approved or not among men, is really a ground of shame: yet how many will boast of their vilest excesses, perhaps, too, even of crimes which they have never committed! How many will glory in the insolence with which they have treated their superiors; the resentment they have shewn towards those who injured them; and the cunning they have exercised in a way of traffic; when, if they viewed these things aright, they would rather blush for them as vile iniquities, and mourn over them in dust and ashes!]

Perhaps the Apostle had a more especial reference to the Judaizing teachers, who sought to distract the Church of God, and gloried in the number of their proselytes. Such he justly calls “dogs, and evil workers^c,” and too many such there are also in this day, whose whole delight is to spread some favourite notions of their own, and who care not how many of Christ’s flock they scatter and destroy, if they can but increase their own party.

Now what is this but their sin and their shame? and to glory in sin, of whatever kind that sin be, is the very spirit of Satan himself, who accounts himself happy in proportion as he can weaken the kingdom of Christ, and establish his own empire over the hearts of men.]

3. “They mind earthly things”—

[To a certain degree earthly things must be minded: but we are not to savour, to relish, or to set our affections upon

^a Jam. iii. 15.

^b Rom. xvi. 18.

^c ver. 2.

them^d. This would be as contrary to the mind and will of God, as to make a god of our belly, or to glory in our shame. Yet how many professed Christians are there who live under the habitual influence of an earthly mind, without ever conceiving that there is any thing wrong in their conduct! In spiritual employments they experience nothing but a stupid uniformity: but in temporal concerns they have many fluctuations of hope and fear, of joy and sorrow, according as their prospects of success brighten, or their apprehensions of disappointment increase. Whence arises this, but from the decided preference they give to carnal and earthly things, above those which are spiritual and heavenly?]

Fidelity requires, that, having delineated the conduct of these professors, we should set before you,

II. The warning here given them—

It is a painful task to rob any of their hopes, and to denounce the terrors of the Lord: and while we engage in it, we would, like the Apostle, proceed with the utmost tenderness and compassion. But we must, at the peril of our own souls, endeavour to undeceive those who are blinded by these delusions. Let such then know,

1. Their real character—

[Many, who are of this description, imagine that they are friends of the Gospel, and that they have a great regard both for Christ and his people. But indeed, “they are enemies of the cross of Christ:” *they withstand its influence over themselves* — — — and *obstruct its influence over others* — — —

What was the intent of the death of Christ but to redeem us from all iniquity^e, and to deliver us from this present evil world^f, and to establish the dominion of Christ over our whole souls^g? This was the effect it produced on others^h; and would on us, if we thoroughly submitted to its influence. Whatever therefore we may imagine or profess, we really are enemies of the cross of Christ, as long as, in our spirit and conduct, we continue hostile to its main design.

The injury which such professors do to the cause of Christ, is incalculable. If they be openly profane, they explode religion altogether, and deter others from regarding its dictates: and if they be more decent in their conduct, they lead men, both by their conversation and example, to suppose that religion consists in mere forms or notions, instead of an entire

^d Φρονοῦντες. See Col. iii. 2.

^g 2 Cor. x. 5.

^e Tit. ii. 14.

^h Gal. vi. 14.

^f Gal. i. 4.

subjugation of the soul to Christ. In what light then must they appear before God? If "he that gathereth not with Christ, is as one that scattereth abroadⁱ," much more must they, who are thus actively engaged in scattering the flock, be deemed his enemies. Yes, brethren, such persons, whatever they may profess, (with grief and sorrow I declare it,) they are no other than enemies of the cross of Christ."]

2. Their certain end—

[It is no wonder that they who mistake their own character, should deceive themselves also with respect to the state to which they are fast approaching. They conclude that their eternal interests are safe: but God declares, that "their end is destruction." Yes indeed! "their end must be according to their works." And do not the Scriptures abundantly confirm this melancholy truth? "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die^k:" "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him^l:" "to be carnally-minded is death^m." Dear brethren, in vain will be all pleas and pretences at the judgment-seat of Christ: to every worker of iniquity, whether he have been an open sensualist, or hypocritical professor, it will be said, "Depart from me, I never knew youⁿ."]

We would subjoin a word or two of ADVICE—

1. Beware lest you rest in an external profession of religion—

[It is easy to adopt the creed of Christians, and to conform our lives to that standard which obtains generally in the world. But it is no easy matter to be a consistent Christian. To maintain an uniform course of self-denial, and of deadness to earthly things, and to glory only in the Lord, *these* are hard lessons: yet nothing less than this will prove us Christians indeed. It is not by our creed, or our professions, that we shall be judged; but by our "*walk*"——— By *that* therefore we must judge ourselves, if we would not be deceived to our eternal ruin.]

2. Be not offended with the Gospel on account of any misconduct in its professors—

[There were *some* even in the Apostles' days who "walked" unworthy of their high and holy calling; yea, there were "*many*." But was the Gospel to be blamed for this? As for those who gave the occasion of offence, it was to them a ground of aggravated condemnation: but the Gospel itself was not a whit less "worthy of all acceptance." So at this day,

ⁱ Matt. xii. 30.

^k Rom. viii. 13.

^l 1 John ii. 15.

^m Rom. viii. 6.

ⁿ Matt. vii. 22, 23.

whatever the conduct of any professors of godliness may be, the Gospel which we preach is the "wisdom of God and the power of God unto salvation" to all those who cordially embrace it. Instead therefore of being offended at it ourselves on account of the misconduct of others, let us study to adorn and recommend it by a consistent "*walk*" and a heavenly conversation.]

3. Watch over one another with care and tenderness—

[None are at liberty to say, "Am I my brother's keeper?" We all should feel a tender concern for the welfare of our fellow-creatures: and especially when we behold those who profess to have the same faith and hope with ourselves, manifesting by their conduct the delusion of their minds, we should *weep over them*, and, with a mixture of fidelity and compassion, declare to them their danger. We are expressly told to "exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day^p:" and though we shall not always give satisfaction to the persons whom we warn, yet shall we really perform towards them the kindest office, and perhaps save them from the destruction to which they were hastening. Then shall we have reason to rejoice over them, as they also will have to bless God for us, to all eternity.]

^o Gen. iv. 9.

^p Heb. iii. 13.

MMCLVIII.

STEADFASTNESS IN GOD.

Phil. iv. 1. *My brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.*

ST. PAUL was a man of feeling, a man of love. He felt for all: for those whom he saw perishing in sin, he would willingly have endured all that men or devils could inflict, if only it might be instrumental to their salvation^a. For those who belonged to Christ, even though they had never seen his face in the flesh, he had great conflicts, striving if by any means he might promote their eternal welfare. But towards those who had been converted by his ministry, he felt as a father towards his children: he could say, "God is my record how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ^b." To

^a Rom. ix. 3.

^b Phil. i. 8.

such is this epistle addressed; as indeed the words of our text clearly evince. Such an accumulation of tender expressions can scarcely be found in the same space in all the Book of God. But what is the drift of them all? Why does he so labour to convince the Philippians of his love, and to conciliate their regards to him? it was, that they might be stirred up to give the more earnest heed to his exhortations, and to “stand fast in the Lord.”

To be “in the Lord” is the character of every believer: he is united unto Christ by faith, and is engrafted into him as a branch of the living vine. But our blessed Lord cautions us again and again to “abide in him,” and warns us against the danger of separation from him^c. In like manner we are frequently exhorted to “stand fast in the Lord;” and so to continue in the faith grounded and settled, that we may not be moved away from the hope of the Gospel.”

To you then we would now address the exhortation, and say, Stand fast in,

I. Your allegiance to him—

Many things will conspire to draw you away from Christ—

[The world, with its vanities on the one hand, and its terrors on the other, will assault you continually — — — the flesh also will operate to bring you into subjection to all its basest lusts — — — Nor will Satan be idle: he, with all his confederate hosts, will strive, by innumerable wiles and temptations, either to subvert your principles, or to vitiate your practice — — — It is a warfare into which you are brought, when once you enlist under the banners of Christ; and you must expect all manner of conflicts to your dying hour.]

But you must be steadfast in your adherence to him—

[You must be “good soldiers of Jesus Christ,” and never cease to fight till you have obtained the victory. Neither hopes nor fears, neither joys nor sorrows, must be suffered to alienate you from him, or to damp your zeal in his service. True it is that the Lord gives you many great and precious promises, that he will keep you, and that nothing shall ever separate you from his love^d. But this is not to encourage supineness; but rather

^c John xv. 1—6.

^d Rom. viii. 35—39.

to make you more earnest in your application to him for protection and support. With the example of Demas before you, you should never cease to fear, lest you also should “fall from your own steadfastness^e,” and “be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ^f.” Aware of your danger, you must “fight the good fight of faith,” and “cleave unto the Lord with full purpose of heart.” “You must be faithful unto death, if ever you would obtain the crown of life.”]

Stand fast also in,

II. Your dependence on him—

From this also you are in danger of being drawn—

[There is in us a continual proneness to self-confidence and self-dependence. We are ever ready to lean to our own understanding to guide us — — — our own righteousness to justify us — — — our own strength to preserve us — — — It is a great matter to have the soul brought to a simple reliance upon the Lord Jesus Christ for every thing.]

But we must live altogether by faith on Christ—

[He is “Head over all things to his Church,” and has all fulness of blessings treasured up in him for our use^g. “He is made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption;” and from him must we receive them all^h, that in, and by, and for all, His name may be glorifiedⁱ — — —]

Nor must any thing be suffered to weaken,

III. Your expectation of his future advent—

To that day there is a particular reference in the preceding context^k—

We are apt to lose sight of that awful day—

[This is evident, from the remissness and negligence with which the things of eternity are pursued. Could we be dull and slothful with that day before our eyes? — — — Could the allurements or terrors of the world have any influence upon our hearts, if we knew and saw that the Judge was at the door? — — —]

But we must stand continually in a state of preparation for it—

[To wait for Christ’s second coming is the habit of mind to which every believer is brought^l: and in proportion as it is formed in the mind, is the progress which we have made in the

^e 2 Pet. iii. 17.

^g Eph. i. 22, 23. Col. i. 19.

ⁱ Isai. xlv. 24, 25. ^k Phil. iii. 20, 21.

^f 2 Cor. xi. 3.

^h John i. 16.

^l 1 Thess. i. 9, 10.

Divine life^m. We should not give way to sloth, like the foolish Virgins; but have “our loins girt, and our lamps trimmed, and ourselves as those who wait for the coming of their Lord.” We should look forward with a holy longing for that day, as the termination of all our conflicts, and the consummation of all our joysⁿ — — — and comfort ourselves with the assured expectation that then we shall be ever with the Lord^o. With that period before our eyes, we shall “be diligent to be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless^p.”]

Permit me, in CONCLUSION, to urge this matter, after the example of the Apostle in my text — — —

^m 1 Cor. i. 7.

ⁿ Tit. ii. 13. 2 Pet. iii. 12.

^o 1 Thess. iv. 17, 18.

^p 2 Pet. iii. 14.

MMCLIX.

CHRISTIAN MODERATION.

Phil. iv. 5. *Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.*

TO lay the foundation of a sinner's hope, is the first duty of a minister: but he must proceed to raise the superstructure also, even such a practice as the Gospel is intended ultimately to produce. The Apostle doubtless felt it a privilege to insist on joy in the Lord; “Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again, I say, rejoice:” but he felt no less the importance of inculcating the duty of moderation with respect to all the things of time and sense; since without that it would be impossible for any one to maintain that high exercise of mind which joy in the Lord imports. It is by a conformity to this latter precept, no less than by his obedience to the former, that the true Christian will be distinguished. In fact, this precept enters very deeply into the divine life: and it is only in proportion as its influence is exhibited in our lives, that we have any satisfactory evidence of our conversion to God.

That it may operate effectually on our hearts, let us consider the two parts of which it consists;

I. The duty enjoined—

The word which we translate “moderation,” imports such a kind of meekness and gentleness as results from an indifference to the world, and a superiority to all the things of time and sense. Perhaps our language does not contain any word of precisely the same import: but the Apostle’s meaning is sufficiently conveyed by the term that is here used. We should have a calm composed state of mind in reference to all things here below; and maintain a constant “moderation,”

1. In our hopes and fears—

[We are apt to magnify the importance of approaching events, and to have our feelings agitated by prospective good or evil, far beyond what they would be by the actual existence of the things foreseen. Good is regarded by us without its manifold circumstances of alloy; and evil without its attendant consolations. In reality, as it is something future that is the main-spring of action to the whole world, so it is by anticipation, rather than by actual experience, that the happiness of mankind is chiefly affected. We say not this in relation to things *spiritual and eternal*; for in reference to *them* the very reverse is true: the circumstance of their being future and invisible diminishes, and almost destroys their influence upon the mind: but in reference to things of a *temporal* nature it is so: upon *them* our imagination exerts all its energies: it paints them in colours of the liveliest or deepest hue; and draws from them by far the greatest portion of its pleasures or its pains. The man whose ambition is fired by prospects of distinction, the heir who looks forward with uncertainty to the possession of an inheritance, the lover who seeks to be assured of a reciprocity in the object of his affections, what pictures do not these persons draw of happiness, if they shall attain, or of misery, if they shall lose, the object of their desire! But such extravagant feelings ill become the Christian: his desires should be curbed by a sense of the vanity of all earthly things, and their utter insufficiency to make us happy. He should commit himself, and all that pertains to him, to the disposal of an all-wise Providence; and leave it to God “to give, or to take away,” as he shall see fit; prepared in either case to bless and glorify him for the dispensation. In a word, he should “be without carefulness,” “casting all his care on God who careth for him.” This lesson our blessed Saviour teaches us in his Sermon on the Mount^a — — — and to have a practical experience of it in our souls is one of the highest attainments of the Christian.]

^a Matt. vi. 25—34.

2. In our joys and sorrows—

[Though it is true, that the mass of mankind are chiefly influenced by what is future, yet there are circumstances wherein a few give up themselves altogether to their present emotions. The voluptuary imagines that he cannot drink too deep of the cup of pleasure; and the mourner, that he cannot yield too much to the anguish of his mind. Both are alike deaf to good advice: the one refuses to be counselled; the other, to be comforted. But “moderation” is the frame which best befits the Christian. He is not insensible to the feelings of humanity; nor is he forbidden to rejoice or grieve, according as the one or other of these emotions is suited to his state. But an equableness of mind is that which he should cultivate under all circumstances: he should not suffer himself to be too much elevated or depressed by present things. His joy should be in God: his sorrows should be chiefly called forth by his own short-comings and defects: and he should be so filled with a sense of the infinite importance of things eternal, as to rise superior to all the vanities of this lower world. St. Paul, in a few verses after the text, informs us how he was affected by the changes which he experienced: “I have learned,” says he, “in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere, and in all things, I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need^b.” Thus it should be with us also: we should be like men of another world, mere pilgrims and sojourners here; thankful for the accommodations which we meet with on the road; and not cast down, if we find some inconveniences; but mainly intent on our journey to a better country, and studious to improve all present circumstances so as most to advance us in our meetness for the heavenly inheritance.]

3. In our spirit and conduct—

[There is in mankind at large, a very undue degree of confidence, both as to the sentiments they embrace, and the line of conduct which they pursue. Every one is ready to fancy himself infallible, and to account all deceived and perverse who differ from him. Hence arises, in the generality, a vehemence in asserting their own opinions, and an intolerance towards those who differ from them. But this disposition of mind must be studiously avoided by every true Christian. There should be in the whole of our sentiments and demeanour, a diffidence which inclines us to suspect ourselves, and a candour which disposes us to make all due allowance for others. Doubtless it becomes us to be thoroughly persuaded in our own

^b ver. 11, 12.

minds, and to act agreeably to that persuasion: but still we should allow to others the same liberty which we claim for ourselves, and be content that others should think and judge for themselves, without desiring to impose upon them any restrictions of our own. How happy would it have been for the Christian world, if such moderation had obtained in the Church, from the period of its first establishment in the apostolic age! But man is a tyrant, and loves to give law to his fellow-men. Few are disposed to distinguish aright between things essential, and things indifferent. If it were said to them that contrarieties may both be right, it would appear a paradox inexplicable. But so it is, and so it is declared by God himself to be, in many things which have most divided men, and called forth against each other their bitterest invectives. The contests about observing days, or eating things offered to idols, how violent they were in the apostolic age! How severely did the weak condemn the strong! and how acrimoniously did the strong despise the weak! yet both the one and the other, so far as they acted to the Lord, were accepted of him, whether they exercised, or forbore to exercise, the liberty which they possessed^c. The same thing at this moment obtains amongst the various denominations of Christians throughout the world. It were difficult to enumerate them all; yet all are as confident of their own exclusive sentiments and habits, as if they had a special revelation from heaven that they alone were right: and the very idea of an unity of action among them, even in things wherein they are all agreed, is by many reprobated as an unbecoming indifference towards their own peculiar party. But is this the “moderation,” that is productive of meekness, and gentleness, and love? No: it is a spirit most contrary to real Christianity, and most studiously to be shunned by all who would adorn their Christian profession. The true temper to be cultivated, is that of the Apostle Paul, who, “though he was free from all, became the servant of all, that he might gain the more^d.”]

Such is the duty here enjoined. Let us now consider,

II. The argument with which it is enforced—

The nearness of death and judgment is a common argument with the Apostles, in support of their various exhortations: and it is fitly applied on this occasion: for we may well be “moderate,” in relation to all earthly things, when we consider how speedily the Lord is coming,

^c Rom. xiv. 1—6.

^d 1 Cor. ix. 19—22.

1. To terminate all the things of time and sense—

[Whatever we have here below, it is but of short duration: whether we are visited with comforts or afflictions, they are all both light and momentary, and therefore unworthy of any serious regard. Let any one look back upon his past life, and see how transient have been both his pleasures and his pains: they are all passed away like a dream; and little remains of them but the bare remembrance that they once existed. Shall we then suffer our minds to be so affected with earthly vanities, as if they were to endure for ever? No; we should sit loose to them, not elated by the enjoyment of them, nor depressed by their loss. This is what we are taught by infallible authority: “This I say, brethren,” says the Apostle; “the time is short: it remaineth that both they that have wives, be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not: and they that use this world, as not abusing it: *for the fashion of this world passeth away*.”]

2. To assign to each that portion which his peculiar case requires—

[The end for which God sends to us a diversity of dispensations is, that we may improve them all for the good of our souls. Our improvement of the various talents committed to us will be particularly inquired into, and form the ground of the sentence that shall be passed upon us. To pass that sentence, our Lord is just ready to come: and therefore the only thing which ought materially to affect us should be, not so much the quality of the dispensations, as the improvement that we make of them. Look, for instance, at the Rich Man and Lazarus: how little remains to them of the comforts or sorrows which they experienced on earth! What is the rich man the better for all his sumptuous fare; or the poor man the worse for all his penury and want? But the use which they made of their respective dispensations, *that* is now the only thing worth a thought. So it will soon be with us: the things which here appeared so important, will have altogether vanished away, and nothing will remain but responsibility for the improvement of them. I say then to all, “Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth:” and in the prospect of your Lord’s second advent to judge the world, be moderate in relation to all present things, whether pleasing or afflictive^f, and let it be your one concern to “be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless^g.” Let

^e 1 Cor. vii. 29—31.

^f 1 Cor. iv. 3—5.

^g 1 Pet. iv. 7. and 2 Pet. iii. 14.

your moderation too be so constant and abiding, that it may "be known unto all men." True it is, that moderation is not of itself calculated to attract notice: it is, in its very nature, unobtrusive and retired. But where it so prevails as to regulate the heart and life, it of necessity diffuses a holy light around us, and serves, by the contrast it exhibits, to gain the admiration of the world. Men gaze and are astonished, when they see we are not under the power of earthly things, as others are: and they are constrained on such occasions to confess the wisdom and excellence of our ways. Thus then let our moderation operate under all circumstances, whether prosperous or adverse: and then shall the efficacy of divine grace be acknowledged, and "God shall be glorified in us."]

MMCLX.

A DISSUASIVE FROM CAREFULNESS.

Phil. iv. 6, 7. *Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

MAN is a prospective creature: he is able to look into futurity; and to give, as it were, a present existence to future things. Indeed, it is from anticipation that his greatest joys and sorrows flow. This faculty of foresight is that which eminently distinguishes him above the rest of the creation. Other creatures equal him in actual enjoyment; but he alone can overleap thousands of intervening years, and derive pleasure or pain from the contemplation of distant events. It is to this faculty that the Scriptures are principally addressed. They set before us the final issue of present things; and declare, that our conduct in this life shall meet with a suitable recompence in the eternal world. Thus, by the hope of good and the fear of evil, they stimulate us to flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on eternal life.

But though this power is capable of being turned to such advantage, yet, through the corruption of our hearts, it is too generally abused. Men look

only at things visible and temporal, instead of looking also at things invisible and eternal. Moreover, their expectations of future good are generally too sanguine; and their apprehensions of future evil weigh more upon their spirits than the occasion requires. Hence arises in their minds an excessive "carefulness," which it is the design of Christianity to counteract.

In the words which we have just read, we have,

I. A dissuasive from carefulness—

By "carefulness" we are not to understand, *attention*; for that is absolutely necessary to the discharge of our duties in the world: but we are to understand, *anxiety*; which, as far as it prevails, argues a state of mind that is injurious to ourselves, and displeasing to God.

The great occasions of anxiety may be reduced to three;

1. Some good desired—

[Men, in different situations of life, have their hearts set upon such things, as may possibly be attained by them, and such as they imagine will conduce greatly to their happiness. Some are eagerly pressing forward to the attainment of honour: others are insatiable in their thirst for gain. Some are altogether wrapped up in an idolatrous attachment to a fellow-creature; others are disquieted, like Rachel^a, and Hannah^b, because they are disappointed in the hopes of a family.

But all such anxieties are sinful. We may *desire* the good things of this life: but our desire must be subordinated to the will of God: and, while we use the proper means of attaining our wishes, we must use them with an entire submission to the disposals of his Providence.]

2. Some evil dreaded—

[Evils foreboded, are often more painful than when actually endured. They not unfrequently press with such a weight upon the mind, as to incapacitate men for the exertions, which would serve at least to mitigate their trials, if not altogether to avert them. For instance, men are sometimes so overcome with the apprehensions of a heavy loss, that they are unable to prosecute with attention their proper business,

^a Gen. xxx. 1.

^b 1 Sam. i. 5—10.

whereby the loss, if sustained, might be in time retrieved. And it is no uncommon thing, to find men sacrificing their honour, their conscience, yea, their very hopes of salvation, in order to avert some impending calamity.

But it would not be thus, if we considered every thing, even "the falling of a sparrow," as regulated by an all-wise God. We might endeavour with propriety to prevent an evil; but we should never be so intimidated by its approach, as to be driven from our dependence on God, or induced to violate our duty to him.]

3. Some trouble felt—

[When trouble is heavy or accumulated, whether it be from disease in our persons, or embarrassment in our circumstances, or the loss of some dear relative, how ready are we to give ourselves up to sorrow, as if our wound were incurable, and our misery irremediable! The instances are not few, wherein men are so overwhelmed by their afflictions, as to have their intellects impaired, and to be reduced to a state of mental derangement. Yea, even worse effects than these are sometimes produced by trouble: for the unhappy sufferers take refuge in suicide; and plunge their souls into hell, to rid themselves of their temporal distresses.

We are not forbidden to give way to grief. The Saviour himself wept at the tomb of his friend. But are there to be no bounds to grief? Should not our sorrow be moderated by the consideration, that the cup is put into our hands by a gracious Father, and that, if drunk in submission to his will, it shall be sanctified to our eternal good? Such excessive "sorrow" is prohibited in the text; and well it may be; since "*nothing*" can warrant it, and its operation is so injurious.]

While the Apostle thus dissuades us from careflessness, he prescribes,

II. An antidote against it—

Prayer is no less our privilege than it is our duty—

[God is ever ready to hear the prayers of his people; and he expects that we should "by prayer and supplication make our requests known to him." Not that he needs to be informed by us; for "he knoweth our necessities before we ask:" but we ought to specify our wants, in order the more deeply to impress a consciousness of them on our own minds, and to make us duly sensible of our dependence on him, and of our obligation to him when our prayers are answered. On all occasions we should have recourse to prayer: "In *every*

thing we should make our requests to God;" in doubt, for direction, (for he will direct our paths^d); in difficulties, for succour, (for he will give grace sufficient for us^e); and in wants, for supply, (for he has engaged that we shall want no manner of thing that is good^f). Nothing is so great but that he is ready to bestow it; nothing is so small, but that we need to ask it at his hands.

But, together with our prayers, we should always offer also thanksgivings. Our troubles are always mixed with mercies, for which we should pay unto our God a tribute of praise. A living man can have no cause to complain^g. While we are out of hell, our troubles must be infinitely less than our deserts. We should therefore approach our God with gratitude for mercies received, and with a dependence on him for those we stand in need of.]

This would be an effectual antidote for excessive carefulness—

[If we commune only with a fellow-creature, we find some relief: but if we go to our God, he will enable us to leave ourselves to his gracious disposal, and to "cast our burthen upon him." Our desires will be weakened by a submission to his will; our fears be allayed by a view of his providence; and our troubles be mitigated by the consolations of his Spirit.]

This part of our subject is more fully opened by,

III. A special commendation of this antidote—

By carefulness "our heart and mind" is overwhelmed—

[We have before noticed the depression of spirit which results from excessive carefulness: and there is but too much reason to believe, that many really die of a broken heart. But where the effect produced by troubles is not so great, yet the mind is dissipated by them; and the thoughts are distracted, so that we cannot exercise them upon other objects, or even fix them in prayer before God.]

But by means of prayer, our hearts and minds shall be kept in peace—

[None but those who have experienced it, can conceive what peace flows into the soul, when we are enabled to commit our ways to God. The heart that was agitated, becomes serene; and the thoughts that were distracted, become

^d Ps. xxv. 9. Isai. xxx. 21. ^e Jam. iv. 6. 2 Cor. ix. 8. and xii. 9.

^f Ps. xxxiv. 9, 10. Matt. vi. 33.

^g Lam. iii. 39.

composed: yea, an inexpressible sweetness pervades the whole man, and turns his sorrows into an occasion of joy^h. "The peace of God," thus infused into the soul, "keeps," as in a garrisonⁱ, both "the heart and mind;" so that if trouble seek to invade us, it can make no impression: not all the good that can be desired, nor all the evil that can be dreaded, nor all the trouble that can be felt, will be able to turn us from our God, or to retard our progress towards heaven.

This blessing comes to us "through Christ Jesus." It is for his sake that our prayers are accepted: it is through him that peace is communicated to us in answer to them: and it is through his agency upon our souls, that this peace becomes a defence against the incursions of care. In short, from Christ Jesus this antidote derives its efficacy; and through him it shall be effectual for the ends for which it is recommended in the text.]

We cannot conclude without OBSERVING,

1. How does religion contribute to men's present happiness!

[Perhaps "carefulness" is a source of more trouble than all other things together. Yet this is taken away, in proportion as we devote ourselves to God. It is true, religion brings with it, if we may so speak, its peculiar sorrows: (not that they spring from religion, but from sin: yet in our fallen state, they certainly are attendant on the exercise of religion.) But godly sorrow is salutary, while "the sorrow of the world worketh death^k." And, if we live nigh to God in prayer and praise, we shall be freed from the disquietudes which harass and distress the whole world beside; and shall dwell as in a haven of peace, while others are tossed to and fro, and are "at their wit's end," upon tempestuous billows. "Commit thy works unto the Lord," says Solomon, "and thy thoughts (not thy *ways* only, but thy *thoughts*, the most fluctuating and ungovernable of all things) shall be established^l."]

2. What enemies to themselves are they, who live in the neglect of prayer!

[If men desired no more than present happiness, they ought to be constant at a throne of grace; since it is there alone that they can get rid of their burthens, or obtain peace unto their souls. But the joys and sorrows of men are not confined to this life: they follow us into the eternal world, and abide with us for ever: and that which is the appointed mean

^h 2 Cor. xii. 7—10.

^k 2 Cor. vii. 10.

ⁱ φρουρήσει.

^l Prov. xvi. 3.

of present blessings, is also the only possible mean of everlasting happiness. The burthen of guilt which lies upon us, can never be removed, but by prayer. Peace with God can never be obtained, but by prayer. And they who will not pray, voluntarily bind their own sins upon them, and reject the proffered mercies of their God. Think, ye prayerless people, how your conduct will appear to you at the day of judgment: "Had I prayed, my sins had been forgiven: had I prayed, I had now been happy beyond all the powers of language to express: but the time is past: prayer will not avail me now: my weeping will be fruitless; my wailing irremediable; my gnashing of teeth eternal."

O that we might all awake from our slumbers! O that we might "arise, and call upon our God!" Then should we understand the efficacy of prayer, and experience its benefits both in time and in eternity.]

MMCLXI.

THE EXTENT OF A CHRISTIAN'S DUTY.

Phil. iv. 8. *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*

THE scope and tendency of Christianity is to ennoble the mind of man, and to restore him to his primitive dignity. If we could frame to ourselves a just idea of what Adam was, when he came out of his Maker's hands, we should see exactly the spirit and conduct to which we are to be reduced by the Gospel. The doctrines of our holy religion, excellent as they are, are of no value any further than they produce this blessed effect. They point out the way in which this change is to be wrought, and supply the only motives that can operate upon us with sufficient weight. In this view they are invariably proposed by the inspired writers, who, having stated them in their epistles, always call our attention to the practical improvement of them.

In the exhortation before us we may notice,

I. The extent of a Christian's duty—

We are at no loss to arrange the particular duties that are here enjoined, since the Apostle himself distributes them into classes :

1. Things “virtuous”—

[Among these “*truth*” is the first in nature and importance ; since, without it, all the bands of society would be dissolved : there would be no such thing as confidence between man and man. Of such consequence is this esteemed in the world, that no virtues, however eminent, can supply the want of it, or render a man respectable, that is regardless of it. And so necessary is it in the eyes of God, that he will banish from him with abhorrence all who wilfully violate its dictates^a, and admit those only to his presence whose adherence to it is strict and uniform^b. This therefore is in the first place to be rigidly adhered to, especially by those who are members of Christ’s mystical body^c. It is not indeed necessary, nor would it be proper, on every occasion, to declare all we know : but we must on no account affirm, or insinuate, what is contrary to truth, either with a view to set off or to exculpate ourselves, or for the purpose of criminating or exalting another. Every species and degree of falsehood should be scrupulously avoided ; and every word we utter should bear the stamp of simplicity and godly sincerity.

Next to this, and inseparably connected with it, is “*justice*.” A Christian is to know but one rule of conduct : he is, in all his intercourse with men, to do as he would be done unto ; that is, to act towards others, as he, in a change of circumstances, would think it right for them to act towards him. To be guilty of fraud in a way of traffic, or in withholding just debts, or in evading taxes, or putting off base coin, or in any other way whatever, is as inconsistent with the Christian character as adultery or murder. Whatever specious pretexts an ungodly world have invented for the justifying of fraud, no one of us approves of it when it is exercised towards himself ; nor will God ever approve of it, however men may extenuate or excuse it : his word to every one of us is, “That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live^d.” And “he knoweth how to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished^e.”

Besides these virtues which have respect to our words and actions, there is one that extends to our very thoughts, and *that* is no less necessary to be cultivated by us than either of the foregoing, namely, “*purity*.” None are so ignorant as not to know, that they ought to restrain their passions, and

^a Prov. vi. 16, 17. Rev. xxi. 8. & xxii. 15.

^b Ps. xv. 2.

^c Eph. iv. 25.

^d Deut. xvi. 20.

^e 2 Pet. ii. 9

have them in subjection. But it is not sufficient for a Christian to refrain from open acts of uncleanness; he must learn to mortify his inward desires: he is to "keep his vessel in sanctification and honour; not in the lusts of concupiscence, like those who know not God^f." He is the temple of the Holy Ghost, and is therefore bound to harbour no thought that may defile that temple, no desire that may grieve his Divine inhabitant^g. In all his words, and looks, and thoughts, he should "be pure as God is pure, and holy as God is holy^h."]

2. Things "praise-worthy"—

[The fore-mentioned duties are so essential to the Christian character, that any considerable and habitual violation of them is utterly inconsistent with it. There are other duties equally necessary to be observed, but which, from the weakness of our nature, and the imperfection of our attainments, admit of greater deviations without impeaching our sincerity before God.

Amongst these, the things which are "*honest*," that is, grave, venerable, decorous, first demand our attention. A Christian should consider what becomes his age and station as a man, and his character as a disciple of Christ. It is disgusting, when people professing godliness, whether men or women, are vying with an ungodly world in dress, and show, and vain parade; in a levity of conduct; in a fondness for vain amusements. There is a gravity that befits the "man of God," who has engaged to walk in his Redeemer's steps. Not that he need to banish mirth, if it be innocent in its nature, and moderate in its degree: nor need the person of opulence to accommodate himself to the habits of a peasant in his style of living: but there is a moderation that he should carefully observe, a limit suited to his character, a bound which he should in no wise transgressⁱ.

Whatever things are "*lovely*," are also highly deserving the Christian's regard. There is a courtesy, a meekness, a gentleness, an affability, a modesty, in a word, an urbanity of manners, which is exceeding amiable, and which conciliates the esteem of all who behold it; *this*, in opposition to rudeness, and an inattention to the feelings of others, should be cultivated by all. A readiness also to sympathise with others in their distress, and to condescend to the meanest offices for their comfort and relief, and a delight in performing all the offices of love, how lovely does this appear, how worthy the pursuit of all that would honour God! To this also may be

^f 1 Thess. iv. 4, 5.

^g 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17. and vi. 19.

^h 1 John iii. 3. and 1 Pet. i. 14—16.

ⁱ Compare Eph. v. 4. 1 Tim. ii. 9, 10. 1 Pet. iii. 2—4.

added a candour in judging, a patience in enduring, a tenderness in forgiving, a liberality in bestowing; an assemblage of such graces as these is the brightest ornament of a child of God; and, as we all admire them when exemplified in others, we should make it our daily study to illustrate them in our own conduct.

Further still, there are many things that are "*of good report*," in which also it should be our ambition to excel. A noble disinterestedness of mind, that rises superior to all selfish considerations, and consults the public good, is an attainment which the heathens themselves accounted most truly honourable. With this we may rank a nobleness in the ends which we seek to accomplish, a wisdom in the means whereby we labour to effect our purpose, a discretion in the manner of employing those means, a due consideration of all circumstances of time and place, a willingness to yield in things indifferent, and a firmness in maintaining what we consider to be right and necessary; a happy combination of these will not fail to exalt a character in the eyes of men, and to procure us respect from those who know how to appreciate such rare endowments. *These* therefore, with whatever else ensures to men a reputation for magnanimity, or goodness of heart, (provided it be good and proper in itself) we should pursue with ardour, and practise with constancy.]

Passing over many other excellencies, such as diligence, contentment, friendship, gratitude, with numberless others to which the Christian's duty extends, let us proceed to notice,

II. The importance of it—

The manner in which the Apostle inculcates these things, very strongly marks his sense, at least, of their importance. His distinct enumeration of so many things, his comprehending of them all a second time under the extensive description of things virtuous and laudable; and lastly, the energetic manner in which he recommends them to our attention and regard, all prove, that he was extremely solicitous to impress our minds with a sense of our duty, and to secure to his exhortation the attention it deserves.

Let us then consider how important the observance of our duty in these respects is,

1. To ourselves—

[*We have no better test of our sincerity before God* than this. Our having embraced new tenets, however just those tenets may be, will not prove that our hearts are right with God: nor will an outward reformation of our conduct suffice to establish our pretensions to true conversion: there must be an uniformity and consistency in our endeavours to serve God: there must be no virtues so small, as to seem unworthy of our attention, or so great, as to discourage us in the pursuit of them. We must never think we have attained any thing, as long as there remains any thing which we have not attained^k.

There is nothing that can more conduce to our present happiness than this. Self-government, next to the immediate enjoyment of the Divine presence, is the sublimest source of happiness in this world. Let any thing that comes under the description before mentioned, be considered in all its bearings and effects, and it will be found highly conducive to the comfort of our own minds, and to the happiness of all around us. Abstracted from the consideration of any future recompence, “the work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever^l.”

Moreover *it tends to increase in our souls a meetness for heaven*. By virtuous actions we attain virtuous habits; and by virtuous habits a conformity to God's image: and our conformity to God in holiness is that which alone constitutes our meetness for glory. Should we not therefore be endeavouring daily to get every lineament of the Divine image engraven on our souls? Should not the hope of growing up into Christ's likeness be an incentive to continual and increased exertions in the way of duty? Need we, or can we have, any greater stimulus than this?

2. To the Church—

[*By this alone can we silence the objections of her adversaries*. In every age the adversaries have vented their calumnies against the Church, as though all her members were hypocrites, and their seeming piety were a cloak for some hidden abominations. They have also represented her doctrines as visionary and enthusiastic, yea, as calculated to subvert the foundations of morality, and to open the floodgates of licentiousness. But when they see a holy and consistent conduct, the joint effect of piety and wisdom, they are constrained to shut their mouths, and to confess that God is with us of a truth^m.

By this also do all her members contribute greatly to their mutual edification and endearment. It is with Christ's mystical

^k Phil. iii. 12—15.

^l Isai. xxxii. 17.

^m 1 Pet. ii. 12, 15. & iii. 16.

body as it is with our natural bodies: when every member performs its proper office, and supplies its proper nutriment, all the parts are kept in activity and vigour, and the whole is confirmed and strengthenedⁿ. Let any of the graces before mentioned be neglected, and disunion will proportionably ensue. Moreover, those members that are most defective in their duty, will most discover a consequent languor and decay. Whereas, the members that are indefatigable in the exercise of these graces, will “make their profiting to appear,” and be enabled to withstand the assaults of all their enemies^o. The former will be a source of trouble and disquietude to the Church; the latter, of harmony and peace.]

3. To the world around us—

[*There is nothing else so likely to fix conviction on the minds of sinners.* The ungodly world will not learn religion from the Bible; nor will listen to it as enforced in the discourses of God’s faithful ministers. But they cannot shut their eyes against the light of a holy life. St. Paul’s epistles are known and read of few: but godly men are “the epistles of Christ, known and read of all men^p :” and many who would not regard the written word, have been won by their godly conversation^q.

On the other hand, *there is nothing that hardens sinners so much as an inconsistent conduct in the professors of religion.* If a saint fall through temptation, or a hypocrite discover his hypocrisy; instantly the world cry out, “There, there, so would we have it^r.” Nor are they satisfied with condemning the individual offenders; they immediately reflect on the whole body of Christians, as hypocrites alike; yea, and blaspheme that adorable Saviour whose religion they profess^s. Thus do they confirm their prejudices against the truth, and justify themselves in their rejection of the Gospel. If then the rescuing of our fellow-creatures from perdition, or the contributing to involve them in it, be so connected with our conduct, of what importance must it be so to demean ourselves, that we may adorn our holy profession, and recommend the Gospel to their favourable acceptance!]

APPLICATION—

[“*Think then upon these things.*” Think of their nature, that you may be apprised of their extent: think of their obligation, that you may be aware of their importance: think of their difficulty, that you may obtain help from your God:

ⁿ Eph. iv. 11—13, 15, 16, 29.

^o 2 Pet. i. 5—11.

^p 2 Cor. iii. 2, 3. ^q 1 Pet. iii. 1, 2. ^r Ps. xxxv. 19, 25.

^s 2 Pet. ii. 2. Rom. ii. 24. 1 Tim. vi. 1.

think of their excellency, that you may be stirred up to abound in them: and think of their complicated effects on the world around you, that you may make your light to shine before men, and that others, beholding it, may glorify your Father that is in heaven^t.]^u

^t Matt. v. 16.

^u Instead of this APPLICATION, the following may be profitably used:—

1. *For the humbling of your souls*—2. *For the endearing of the Gospel to you*—3. *And for the regulating of your whole spirit and conduct.*

1. For the humbling of your souls—

[Whence is it that there is so little humiliation and contrition amongst us? it is because we do not try ourselves by a just standard. We look only to more flagrant transgressions; and therefore even the worst of us only view ourselves like the sky in a cloudy night, when only a few stars are seen and at great intervals; but if we would take the text for the ground of our estimate, the very best of us would see ourselves like the sky in the clearest night studded with stars innumerable, our whole lives being, as it were, one continuous mass of transgression and sin — — — If we would habituate ourselves to such reviews of our conduct from day to day, we should find no difficulty in acknowledging ourselves “less than the least of all saints,” yea, and “the very chief of sinners.”]

2. For the endearing of the Gospel to you—

[O how precious would the Saviour be to you, if you saw yourselves in your true colours! And with what delight would you plunge into “the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness!” But the same false estimate of ourselves which keeps us from humiliation, keeps us also from valuing the Gospel of Christ. If we would love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, we should get a deeper sense of our need of him, and of the love he has shewn us in giving himself to die for us.

It is in this way also that we must learn to prize the influences of the Holy Spirit. When we see what a holy and refined character that of the true Christian is, we shall necessarily say, “Who is sufficient for these things?” And, feeling our need of Divine help, we shall implore of God to “strengthen us with might by his Spirit in the inner man,” and to “perfect his own strength in our weakness” — — —]

3. For the regulating of your whole spirit and conduct—

[Whilst you see what a lovely character the Christian is, and how bright it shone in our blessed Lord, you will strive to follow his steps, and to “walk as he walked.” Let there then be in you nothing but what is virtuous and praise-worthy. And, if you profess to have been “called with an holy calling,” see that you “walk worthy of your high calling,” or rather, walk worthy of him that hath called you; that so God may be glorified in you, and you be rendered meet for his heavenly inheritance — — —]

MMCLXII.

PAUL AN EXAMPLE FOR US.

Phil. iv. 9. *Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do : and the God of peace shall be with you.*

NO man was ever more averse to boasting than the Apostle Paul : and, when compelled to declare what God had done in him or by him, he appeared to himself “a fool,” for uttering it ; though he was conscious that he acted, not from choice, but from absolute and indispensable necessity. But, in truth, what might be called boasting in an uninspired man, was not deserving of that name in him ; because he knew that he had been raised up by God, to be an instructor to mankind, both in his doctrines and example. Hence he not only affirmed, that “his word was the word, not of man, but of God^a ;” but exhorted men to “be followers and imitators of him^b,” “even as he was of Christ^c.” In the chapter preceding our text, he speaks strongly to this effect : “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them who walk so, as ye have us for an ensample^d.” Nor did he confine his exhortation to a reception of his doctrines merely : he suggested the same in reference to his conduct also^e. He was a great advocate for practical religion ; and urged on his Philippian converts a diligent attention to “every thing which was true, and honest, and just, and pure, and lovely, and of good report :” and then, in reference both to his precepts and example, he added, “Those things which ye have both learned and received, and heard and seen in me, do ; and the God of peace shall be with you.”

To enforce this exhortation, I will set before you,
I. The lessons he has taught us—

Of course, I can speak of these but in a very general and superficial way. Your time would not

^a 1 Thess. ii. 13.

^b 1 Cor. iv. 16.

^c 1 Cor. xi. 1. *μιμηταί.*

^d Phil. iii. 17.

^e 2 Thess. iii. 9.

suffice for a full consideration of them; nor does my present subject require more than a brief notice of what he inculcated as due,

1. To God—

[It was not “a divided heart” that he called on men to offer to their God and Saviour: he taught them to surrender up themselves as living sacrifices to him; and to be as entirely devoted to him, as a victim is when offered upon the altar. As for our own ease, pleasure, interest, he would not have us consult them for a moment, in comparison of, and still less in opposition to, the will of God: “No man,” says he, “liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself: for, whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s: for to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be the Lord both of the dead and living^f.” And this duty he binds upon us by the strongest of all obligations, even that of redeeming love, which it were most criminal to resist: “Ye are not your own: ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God with your body and your spirit, which are God’s^g.” He would have the whole spirit, soul, and body, sanctified unto the Lord^h.”]

2. To man—

[This duty, also, is co-extensive with the former, only in subordination to God, and with a view to his glory. There is nothing which we are not to do for man, nor any thing which we are not willingly to suffer for him, if only we may be instrumental to the promoting of his spiritual and eternal welfare. And the Apostle inculcates this with the same precision and force as the former: “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” (We are to forget self, with a view to his benefit, as much as we are with a view to God’s glory.) “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus; who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the crossⁱ.” Did our blessed Lord, who was God equal with the Father, empty himself of all his glory, and suffer the most excruciating torments, for the salvation of men? There is nothing, then, which we also should not be ready either to do or suffer for the welfare of their souls.

^f Rom. xiv. 7—9.

^g 1 Cor. vi. 20.

^h 1 Thess. v. 23.

ⁱ Phil. ii. 4—8.

It may however be asked, What are we to do, if they become our enemies, and seek to destroy us? I answer, Contend with them: if they will fight, so do ye fight: and the more they exert themselves, the greater let your efforts be also. Only remember, that your weapon must not be like theirs: They fight with evil; but you must have no weapon but good. Nor must you ever yield to them; but to your latest hour, and with your latest breath, you must keep up the conflict, even as the first martyr Stephen did. This is St. Paul's own direction, "Be not overcome of evil; but overcome evil with good^k."]

Such are the duties which St. Paul inculcates: and this view of them will lead us to notice,

II. The example he has set us—

As, in his Epistle to Timothy, St. Paul says, "Thou hast fully known my doctrine, and manner of life¹;" so he here refers the Philippians, first, to what they had "learned and received from him;" and then, to what they had "heard and seen in him."

1. What, then, were his principles?

[They were precisely and practically such as he had inculcated on others. Did he enjoin on others to be dead to the world, and to self? Hear what he declares to have been his own experience; "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me^m." Yea, so entirely was he under the constrained sense of redeeming love, that he shuddered at the very thought of glorying in any thing but the cross of Christ," and more especially because, "through the influence of that, the whole world was crucified unto him, as he also was unto the worldⁿ."]

2. With these his whole life was in perfect unison—

[Nothing could abate *his zeal for God*. Not all the trials which human nature is capable of sustaining could move him in the least: he counted not life itself dear to him, if he were called to sacrifice it for righteousness' sake: on the contrary, he was ready to suffer bonds, or death, at any time, and in any way, for the honour of his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ^o. Nor were there any bounds to his *love to man*. He panted for the salvation of all men, and especially of those who were "his

^k Rom. xii. 21.

¹ 2 Tim. iii. 10.

^m Gal. ii. 20.

ⁿ Gal. vi. 14.

^o Acts xx. 24. and xxi. 13.

brethren according to the flesh :” and, when he could not prevail on them to embrace the Gospel which he offered to them, he called God to witness what grief their obduracy occasioned him : “ I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness, and continual sorrow in my heart, for my brethren’s sake^p.” Still more, for the prosperity of his converts he was so anxious, that his whole soul was, as it were, wrapt up in them : “ Now I live, if ye stand fast in the Lord^q.” And so far was he from regretting any thing that he suffered for their sake, that he accounted such sufferings his privilege, his honour, his happiness : “ If,” says he, “ I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all : for the same cause do ye also joy and rejoice with me^r.”]

And, now, who can doubt,

III. The blessedness of taking him for our model ?

Doubtless here is a high standard for us to aim at : but no lower standard can possibly be admitted. What, if we cannot attain to the eminence of St. Paul ? we should not willingly rest in any thing short of it ; or, if we had even attained to it, we should, like him, press forward for still higher attainments, that, if possible, we might be “ pure as Christ himself was pure,” and “ perfect even as our Father who is in heaven is perfect.” And to this we are encouraged by St. Paul, who says, “ Those things which ye have learned and received, and heard and seen in me, do ; and the God of peace shall be with you.” Now, it is certainly true, that if we aspire thus after universal holiness, God will be with us,

1. In a way of special manifestation—

[He assumes the endearing name of “ the God of peace,” as he does elsewhere of “ the God of love and peace^s :” and under this character will he reveal himself to his obedient people. Yes, “ great peace shall they have who love his law,” “ a perfect peace,” “ a peace that passeth all understanding.” What terms would suffice to give any adequate idea of “ the love of God shed abroad in the heart,” and of “ the light of his reconciled countenance lifted up upon the soul ?” You would in vain attempt to convey to a person who had all his days been immured in a dark dungeon, a just conception of

^p Rom. ix. 1, 2.

^r Phil. ii. 17, 18.

^q 1 Thess. iii. 8.

^s 2 Cor. xiii. 11.

the splendour and influence of the meridian sun: how then can the feeble language of mortality describe the action of Almighty God upon the soul, which he deigns to visit with his more immediate presence? Suffice it however to say, that such visits are realized in the souls of God's faithful people; and that "both the Father and the Son will come down to them, and dwell in them, and make their abode with them^t," and turn their very souls into the sanctuary of the Most High.]

2. In a way of effectual support—

[Persons who resemble the Apostle Paul in their spirit and conduct will be sure to resemble him, in some degree at least, in his trials and afflictions. It is not possible but that those who love darkness rather than light, should hate such lights as these. In truth the more bright a man's light shines before an ungodly world, the more must he expect to be hated, reviled, and persecuted, even as our incarnate God himself was, during the time of his sojourning on earth: for "the servant cannot be above his Lord:" and "if they called the Master of the house of Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household^u." But, need the godly indulge any fears on that account? No; for "greater is he He that is in them, than he that is in the world^x." Men may *assault* you with all their might: but it may be confidently asked, "Who is he that shall *harm* you, if ye be followers of that which is good^y?" Men may keep all human aid from you: but who can intercept the visits of your God? Hear his own express promise, given for your encouragement and support: "Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." And then, lest a sense of your own weakness, and of the overbearing power of your enemies, should discourage you, he adds, "Fear not, thou *worm* Jacob: I will make *thee* a new sharp threshing instrument, having teeth; and *thou* shalt thresh *the mountains*^z." Yes truly, "if God be for you, who can be against you^a?"]

3. In a way of complete and everlasting fruition—

["Whom God loveth, he loveth to the end^b:" and if he be with us as a God of peace in this world, he will be with us under the same endearing character to all eternity. What he said to Abraham *personally*, he says to all the children of Abraham: "Fear not; I am thy shield, and thy exceeding

^t John xiv. 21, 23.

^u Matt. x. 25.

^x 1 John iv. 4.

^y 1 Pet. iii. 13.

^z Isai. xli. 10, 14—16.

^a Rom. viii. 31.

^b John xiii. 1.

great reward^c." The present state of the Church, with all her privileges and blessings, is only a prelude to, and a preparation for, a state of far higher blessedness; as St. John expressly informs us: "I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the Tabernacle of God is with men; and *he will dwell with them*, and they shall be his people; and *God himself shall be with them*, and be their God^d." "Then will all trials, of whatever kind, have passed away," and their bliss be absolutely perfect: "the sun itself shall be no more their light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto them; but the Lord himself shall be to them an everlasting light, and *their God their glory*^e."

ADDRESS—

1. The lukewarm Christian—

[How unlike art thou to the Apostle Paul! Should not this very circumstance make thee tremble for thy state? How couldest thou venture, even in the most qualified manner, to address those who have witnessed thy life and conversation in terms resembling those which St. Paul used in my text? Thou hast not the divine presence even with thine own soul. Thou knowest not what it is to have God with thee as "a God of peace;" manifesting himself to thee, and filling thee with his consolations. If thou wert to address any as the Apostle did, thine own conscience would remonstrate with thee, as a deceiver, and an enemy both to God and man. So far from God approving of thy state, he speaks of it in such terms of abhorrence as modern delicacy almost forbids one to repeat^f. I pray you, brethren, rest not in a state so fatal to yourselves, and so injurious to all around you. The very circumstance of your having some little regard for God, is that which is most likely to deceive yourselves and all around you. Awake, I pray you, from your delusion, lest you perish under the accumulated guilt of dishonouring God more than any professedly ungodly men can do; and of betraying, to their eternal ruin, multitudes, who fix on you for their standard and example.]

2. Those who desire to approve themselves truly unto God—

[Fix your standard high: take the Holy Scriptures for your guide; and the Apostle Paul as second only to Christ himself for your example. Be not afraid of being "righteous overmuch," provided only that you are righteous in a *proper*

^c Gen. xv. 1.

^d Rev. xxi. 23.

^e Rev. xxi. 4. and xxii. 5. with Isai. lx. 19. ^f Rev. iii. 16.

manner. You can never love God too much : nor can you ever love man too much, provided you love him in suberviency to God. Methinks you may advance far beyond what you have already attained, before you will equal the Apostle Paul : and if at this moment you even equalled him, you would still be far from having already attained the perfection at which you should aim. Study then his character ; mark it in its sublimest traits ; and follow it in the whole of your life and conversation. Let his principles be yours ; his spirit yours ; his conduct yours. This is the way to honour God, and to be happy in your own souls : and “ if you do these things, you shall never fall, but shall have an entrance ministered unto you abundantly into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ^g.”]

g 2 Pet. i. 10, 11.

MMCLXIII

CONTENTMENT.

Phil. iv. 11, 12. *I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound : every where and in all things I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.*

ST. PAUL was by no means addicted to boasting. But there were occasions whereon it was necessary for him to declare the secret workings of his heart, in order that he might prevent a misinterpretation of his words, or a misapprehension of his designs. He commends the Philippians for the care which they had taken of him, and the kind attention they had shewn him, during his imprisonment at Rome. But, fearful lest he should be understood as complaining of his necessities when immured in a prison, or as wishing, on his own account, a continuance of their attentions, he tells them, that “ he had learned, in whatsoever state he was, therewith to be content :” and, in the fulness of his heart, he expatiates upon this idea, as though he would recommend to all persons, in this respect, to follow his example.

Let me, then,

I. State to you the experience of St. Paul—

In unfolding it, I would entreat you particularly to notice,

1. The invaluable lesson he had learned—

[Greatly diversified had been his states ; but “in all, he had learned to be content.” The word which we translate “content” comprehends much more than a mere quiescent state of mind. The term “self-sufficient,” if it did not convey to an English reader a wrong idea, would more exactly express the import of the original^a. The Apostle had within himself that which was abundantly sufficient for him, even though he should be reduced to the utmost possible state of destitution, so far as related to the things of this life. He was possessed of all that man could desire : he had God as his Father, Christ as his Saviour, the Holy Spirit as his Comforter, and heaven as his home. What could he want more ? What could he desire, that could add to this ? or what could he lose, that could detract from this ? This which he had within him was altogether out of the reach of men or devils. The Holy Spirit was within him “a well of water, springing up into everlasting life^b ;” so that he enjoyed the utmost composure of mind, assured that nothing could impoverish him, nothing hurt him, nothing disturb the tranquillity that he enjoyed.]

2. The vast proficiency he had attained in it—

[At some seasons, he abounded with all that even a carnal mind could wish : but at other seasons he was exposed to as heavy trials as humanity could well sustain. “He was in labours more abundant than any of the Apostles, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews, five times received he forty stripes save one ; thrice was he beaten with rods ; once was he stoned ; thrice he suffered shipwreck ; a night and a day he was in the deep ; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by his own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren ; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness ; besides those things that are without, that which came upon him daily, the care of all the Churches^c.” Now all this, I think, may be said to have put his principle to a severe trial. And did he still preserve his equanimity ? still feel contentment under all ? Yes, under all. “Nothing could move him.” The internal support he felt, from a consciousness that he was under the Divine care, and executing

^a *αὐτάρκης*.^b John iv. 14.^c 2 Cor. xi. 23—28.

the Divine will, and advancing the Divine glory, upheld him under all circumstances, and far more than counterbalanced all his sufferings. In all this he was “instructed,” or, as the word means, *initiated*, as into a *deep mystery*^d. It was *from an insight into the mystery of the Gospel that he gained this extraordinary and invaluable grace*. From this mystery he acquired the knowledge of God as reconciled to him in Christ Jesus, and as engaged for him to supply his every want both in time and eternity. No other instruction could ever have produced such effects: but the knowledge of this mystery was quite adequate to the occasion, and perfectly sufficient to form his soul to these high attainments. “He was thus crucified to the world by the cross of Christ^e.”]

Having traced the Apostle’s experience, let me,

II. Commend it to your imitation—

What an enviable state was his! Let me recommend it you,

1. As a reasonable state—

[This perfect contentment with our every lot is reasonable, irrespective of all the great mysteries of the Gospel. For, what would our condition have long since been, if God had dealt with us according to our deserts? We should “not have had so much as a drop of water to cool our tongues.” Who can reflect one moment upon this, and repine at any lot which he may receive on this side the grave? What! “a living man complain! a man for the punishment of his sins!” especially when he considers what an infinitely worse portion he merits, and from which there could never be, as now there may, a deliverance, with a transition to the realms of bliss! But, I suppose you to have been admitted into the school of Christ. I suppose you to be a partaker of his salvation. Tell me then—possessing, as you do, the unsearchable riches of Christ, and looking forward, as you do, to the speedy and everlasting enjoyment of all the glory of heaven—does it become you to regard as of any great importance the things of time and sense? See the Apostle in prison, his feet fast in the stocks, and his back torn with scourges; and yet his soul so full of joy, that he is singing praises to God at midnight: and will you not be ashamed to complain of your minor sorrows? Or rather, see the Son of God himself, impoverishing himself to enrich you, and welcoming death itself in order to advance you to everlasting life: see him, I say, enduring to the end; when, if it had pleased him, more than twelve legions of angels would

^d μεμύημαι.

^e Gal. vi. 14.

have come to rescue him from his sufferings; and will you complain of any thing which you may suffer for him? Methinks you feel, every one of you, that the most perfect contentment is that which becomes you under every state, to which, by any possibility, you may be reduced.]

2. As a blessed state—

[The corporeal pain which men endure in this life is nothing in comparison of the mental. Let the spirit of a man be at ease, and it will enable him to bear any bodily infirmity whatever. On the other hand, no accumulation of wealth or honour or sensual gratifications can sustain a man whose heart and spirit are oppressed^f. Suppose two angels sent from heaven to execute for a season two different offices on earth; the one to rule a kingdom, the other to sweep the streets: would they not be equally happy, in doing the work assigned them? Let their places then be changed: would the one be inordinately pleased with his elevation, or the other be unduly grieved at his depression? Assuredly not. In whichever state they were, they should remember “whose they were, and whom they were serving,” and what blessedness awaited them the very instant they had performed their destined work; and, *possessed of this sufficiency within*, they would be unmoved by any thing without, and would have in perfection the grace described in my text. Thus, in proportion as we are initiated into the great mystery of the Gospel, will this equanimity prevail in us; and under all circumstances will “our souls be kept in perfect peace.” A mariner, knowing the soundness of his vessel, and the skill of him who is at the helm, does not tremble at the gale which is sent to bear him to his destined home. No; he spreads his sails, and, though tossed upon the waves, anticipates with joy the issue of his voyage, and the rest which he will attain in the bosom of his friends. This blessedness, then, will attend you, my brethren, if once you learn the sublime lesson which is here taught you in my text. You shall find, indeed, that “godliness with contentment is great gain^g.”]

3. As an honourable state—

[Who does not see how greatly the Gospel is honoured, in producing such an experience as this? Yea, and God himself too is honoured by it, in that such is the fruit which invariably proceeds from the Gospel of his dear Son. In this state, man is assimilated to God himself. Behold our incarnate God! Behold him on Mount Tabor in his transfiguration, or in his triumphant entry into Jerusalem amidst

^f Prov. xviii. 14.

^g 1 Tim. vi. 6.

the hosannahs of the populace, and you find in him no undue elation of mind: or view him in the garden of Gethsemane, or in the hall of Pilate, or when suspended on the cross, you see in him no undue depression. He drank with composure the cup which God had put into his hands; saying, "Not my will, but thine be done." Religion does not divest men of the feelings of humanity; but moderates, directs, and perfects them. It leaves us at liberty to deprecate sufferings, provided we do it in submission to the Divine will: but, at the same time, it so elevates us above them, as to render them incapable of diverting us from the service of our God, or of retarding us in our progress heaven-ward. Philosophical principles have effected much to compose the minds of sufferers: but it is the Gospel alone which gives effectual power so to rise above the things of time and sense, as to possess, under all circumstances, the contentment spoken of in our text.]

But you will naturally ASK, How am I to "learn" this lesson? I ANSWER,

1. Apply to God for the influences of his Holy Spirit—

[It is, as I have said, the knowledge of Christ crucified, and that alone, that can ever fill the soul and render it superior to all earthly things. But who can give you that knowledge? It is the office of "the Holy Spirit to take of the things of Christ, and to reveal them unto us." None but he can "open the eyes of our understanding:" none but he can "guide us into all truth:" nor can any but he renew our souls after the Divine image — — — Pray then to God for the gift of his Holy Spirit: and, if you yourselves would not mock your child with giving him a stone when he asked for bread, much less will God mock you, by refusing to impart to you this gift, in which all good things for time and for eternity are contained.]

2. Contemplate the fulness which is treasured up for you in Christ Jesus—

["It has pleased the Father, that in Christ should all fulness dwell:" and for you is it treasured there, that "you may receive out of it" according to your necessities. Hence then, if you have believed in Christ, you are authorized to say, "All things are mine, since I am Christ's." And if *all* things are yours, whether "things present, or things to come," what can you lack? or what ground can you have for discontent? Only get clear views of Christ as your righteousness and strength, and you will be at no loss for the attainment which your soul desires — — —]

3. Survey the glory that is reserved for you in heaven—

[What does it matter to a traveller, if his accommodations, where he stops but a few minutes, be not exactly such as he could wish? Can they carry me forward to my destined home? will be his main inquiry: and if he find that he can attain his wishes in this respect, he will not lay to heart the little inconveniences which he is to sustain for so short a time. The comforts which he shall enjoy at home occupy his mind; and the very discomforts of the way endear to him the end, and make him look forward to it with augmented zest. Let it then be thus with you, my brethren: ye are only pilgrims and sojourners here: and, if you dwell with blessed anticipations on your eternal rest, you will become indifferent to the accommodations of the way; and, according to the grace given to you, will be enabled to say, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."]

MMCLXIV.

EXTENT AND SOURCE OF THE CHRISTIAN'S POWER.

Phil. iv. 13. *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*

THERE are in the sacred writings many various, and apparently opposite, representations of the Christian's state: he is mournful, yet happy; sinful, yet holy; weak, yet possessed of a derived omnipotence. These paradoxes are incomprehensible to the world at large: but the solution of them is easy to those who know what man is *by nature*, and what he is *by grace*, and what are the effects which flow from the contrary and contending principles of flesh and spirit. Nothing can be more incredible, at first sight, than the assertion in the former part of our text: but, when qualified and explained by the latter part, it is both credible and certain: yea, it presents to our minds a most encouraging and consoling truth.

In elucidating this passage, we shall shew,

I. The extent of a Christian's power—

Using only such a latitude of expression as is common in the Holy Scriptures, we may say concerning every true Christian, that he can,

1. Endure all trials—

[In following his Divine Master, he may be called to suffer reproaches, privations, torments, and death itself. But “none of these can move him.” When his heart is right with God, he can “rejoice that he is counted worthy to suffer shame for his Redeemer’s sake^a,” he can “suffer the loss of all things, and yet count them but dung^b,” under extreme torture, he can refuse to accept deliverance, in the prospect of “a better resurrection^c,” he can say, “I am ready to die for the Lord’s sake^d,” and when presented at the stake as a sacrifice to be slain, he can look upon his sufferings as a matter of self-congratulation and exceeding joy^e.]

2. Mortify all lusts—

[Great are his inward corruptions; and many are the temptations to call them forth: but he is enabled to mortify and subdue them^f. “The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life,” are very fascinating: but “the grace of God, which has brought salvation to his soul, has taught him to deny them all, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world^g.” “By the great and precious promises of the Gospel, he is made a partaker of the Divine nature^h,” and is stirred up to “cleanse himself from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of Godⁱ.”]

3. Fulfil all duties—

[Every different situation brings with it some correspondent duties: prosperity demands humility and vigilance; adversity calls for patience and contentment. Now the Christian is “like a tree that is planted by the rivers of water, and bringeth forth its fruits *in its season*^k.” It is to this change of circumstances that the Apostle more immediately refers in the text: “I have learned,” says he, “in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere, and in all things, I am instructed, both to be full, and to be hungry; both to abound, and to suffer need. *I can do all things*^l.” The Christian knows that all his duties are summed up in love to God, and love to man: he is assured, that no changes in his condition can for one moment relax his obligation to approve himself to God in the execution of these duties: and he en-

^a Acts v. 41.^b Phil. iii. 8.^c Heo. xi. 35.^d Acts xxi. 13.^e Phil. ii. 17, 18. 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13.^f Gal. v. 24.^g 1 John ii. 15, 16. with Tit. ii. 12.^h 2 Pet. i. 4.ⁱ 2 Cor. vii. 1.^k Ps. i. 3.^l ver. 11—13.

deavours to avail himself of every wind that blows, to get forward in his Christian course.

But in reference to all the foregoing points, we must acknowledge, that all Christians are not equally advanced; nor does any Christian so walk as not to shew, at some time or other, that "he has not yet attained, nor is altogether perfect^m." We must be understood therefore as having declared, rather what the Christian "*can* do," than what he actually does in all instances. "In many things he still offendsⁿ;" but he aspires after the full attainment of this proper character: in the performance of his duties, he aims at *universality in the matter, uniformity in the manner, and perfection in the measure* of them.]

The Christian's power being so extraordinary, we may well inquire after,

II. The source from whence he derives it—

The Christian *in himself* is altogether destitute of strength—

[If we consult *the Scripture representations* of him, we find that he is "without strength^o," and even "dead in trespasses and sins^p." Nor, after he is regenerate, has he any more power that he can call his own; for "in him, that is, in his flesh, dwelleth no good thing^q."

If *our Lord's assertion* may be credited, "without him we can do nothing;" we are like branches severed from the vine^r.

If *the experience of the most eminent Apostle* will serve as a criterion, he confessed, that he "had not of himself a sufficiency even to think a good thought; his sufficiency was entirely of God^s."

His power even to do the smallest good is derived from Christ—

["It has pleased the Father, that in Christ should all fulness dwell^t," and that "out of his fulness all his people should receive^u." It is he who "strengthens us with all might by his Spirit in the inner man^x:" it is he who "gives us both to will and to do^y." If we are "strong in any degree, it is in the Lord, and in the power of *his* might^z." Whatever we do, we must give him the glory of it, saying, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me^a:" "I have laboured; yet not

^m Phil. iii. 12.

^p Eph. ii. 1.

^q 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^x Eph. iii. 16.

^z Eph. vi. 10.

ⁿ Jam. iii. 2.

^o Rom. vii. 15, 18, 19.

^t Col. i. 19.

^y Phil. ii. 13. Heb. xiii. 21.

^a Gal. ii. 20.

^o Rom. v. 6.

^r John xv. 5.

^u John i. 16.

I, but the grace of God which was with me:" "by the grace of God I am what I am^b."

Nor is it by strength *once* communicated, that we are strong; but from continual communications of grace from the same overflowing fountain. It is not through Christ who *hath strengthened*, but who *doth strengthen* us, that we can do all things^c. We need fresh life from him, in order to the production of good fruit; exactly as we need fresh light from the sun, in order to a prosecution of the common offices of life. One moment's intermission of either, would instantly produce a suspension of all effective industry.]

From that source he receives all that he can stand in need of—

[Christ is not so prodigal of his favours, as to confer them in needless profusion: he rather apportions our strength to the occasions that arise to call it forth^d. He bids us to renew our applications to him; and, in answer to them, imparts "grace sufficient for us^e." There are no limits to his communications: however "wide we open our mouth, he will fill it^f." He is "able to make *all* grace abound towards us, that we, having *always all-sufficiency* in *all* things, may abound unto *every* good work^g:" he is ready to "do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think^h." "If only we believe, *all* things shall be possible unto usⁱ:" we shall be "able to quench *all* the fiery darts of the devil^k," and "be more than conquerors over *all* the enemies of our souls^l."]

The *USES* to which we may apply this subject, are,

1. The conviction of the ignorant—

[Many, when urged to devote themselves to God, reply, that we require more of them than they can do; and that it is impossible for them to live according to the Scriptures. But what ground can there be for such an objection? Is not Christ ever ready to assist us? Is not Omnipotence pledged for our support? Away with your excuses then, which have their foundation in ignorance, and their strength in sloth. Call upon your Saviour; and he will enable you to "stretch forth your withered hand:" at his command, the dead shall arise out of their graves; and the bond-slaves of sin and Satan shall be "brought into the liberty of the children of God."]

2. The encouragement of the weak—

^b 1 Cor. xv. 10.

^c ἐνδυναμοῦντι.

^d Deut. xxxiii. 25.

^e 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^f Ps. lxxxix. 10.

^g 2 Cor. ix. 8.

^h Eph. iii. 20.

ⁱ Mark ix. 23.

^k Eph. vi. 16.

^l Rom. viii. 37.

[A life of godliness cannot be maintained without constant watchfulness and strenuous exertion. And there are times when "even the youths faint and are weary, and the young men utterly fall." But "if we wait upon our God we shall certainly renew our strength, and mount up with wings as eagles^m." If we look "to Him on whom our help is laidⁿ," the experience of David shall be ours: "In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul^o." Let not any difficulties then discourage us. "Let the weak say, I am strong^p;" and the stripling go forth with confidence against Goliath. Let us "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus^q," and "his strength shall assuredly be perfected in our weakness^r."]

^m Isai. xl. 30, 31.

ⁿ Ps. lxxxix. 19.

^o Ps. cxxxviii. 3.

^p Joel iii. 10.

^q 2 Tim. ii. 1.

^r 2 Cor. xii. 9.

MMCLXV.

ALL NEEDFUL SUPPLIES THROUGH CHRIST.

Phil. iv. 19. *My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*

AS it is a pleasing reflection to a generous man, that the object whom he relieves will have his condition meliorated, so is it a most delightful thought to a grateful mind, that there is One both able and engaged to recompense our benefactors. Were it not for this consideration, the reluctance which many feel to be burthensome to their friends, would scarce suffer them to accept the most needful assistances: but this hope both enhances the value, and gives zest to the enjoyment, of every kindness we receive. Such was the Apostle's experience, when his necessities had been relieved by the Philippian Church: he would have been well content to have wanted their present, as far as it related to his own comfort; but, as it was profitable to the donors themselves, he "desired fruit that might abound to their account^a." Having declared on what grounds he was so well pleased with their gifts, he assured them, that God would be

^a Phil. iv. 17.

mindful of all their wants, and abundantly supply them in the hour of need.

To enter fully into the scope of his words, we should inquire,

I. When are we authorized to call God *our* God?

It is not every claim that presumptuous sinners take upon them to advance, that will be found authorized in the Holy Scriptures; for our Lord himself assured many that Satan was their father, at the very time that they called themselves the children of God^b. But we may justly consider God as standing in this relation to us,

1. When we are born again of his Spirit?

[While we continue in our natural state, we are enemies to God, and God is an enemy to us; but when we are begotten by the word and Spirit of God, we are privileged to consider ourselves as his children, and to cry to him, "Abba, Father^c."]

2. When we have devoted ourselves to his service?

[If we would know "whose we are," we must inquire, "whom we serve;" for "to whomsoever we yield ourselves servants to obey, his servants we are, whom we obey^d." If our consciences testify that we have solemnly dedicated ourselves to God, we may boldly say with David, "O God, thou art *my* God." We may be sure that our "Beloved is ours, when we (by a voluntary surrender of ourselves to him,) are his."]

When this point is satisfactorily settled in our minds, we may with more comfort inquire,

II. To what extent we may expect communications from him?

That God who pours out his benefits upon the evil and unthankful, is far more abundant in kindness towards his own children. He will give us,

1. According to our necessities—

[If we desire temporal things, "we shall want no manner of thing that is good;" if spiritual blessings be sought after, there is not any thing we can need, which shall not be bestowed upon us in the time and measure that Infinite Wisdom sees to be best for us. Are we wretched and miserable, and

^b John viii. 41, 44. ^c John i. 12. Gal. iv. 6. ^d Rom. vi. 16.

poor, and blind, and naked? He will both suit his gifts to our necessities^e; and make the very depth of our misery the measure of his own mercy.]

2. According to the riches of his own grace—

[Let us survey all the tokens of his bounty on earth, and contemplate all the expressions of his love in heaven; let us go farther, and consider the incomprehensible fulness of all the good that is in him as the fountain; and *then* shall we find the true measure of his liberality to his children. If any partake of his goodness in a lower degree, it is, “not because they are straitened in him, but because they are straitened in their own bowels.”]

That none may lose these blessings through ignorance, we proceed to state

III. By what channel they shall be conveyed to us—

With man in innocence God communed face to face: but, whatever he bestows upon us in our fallen state, he communicates it,

1. Through Christ as our mediator—

[“God in himself is a consuming fire;” nor is it possible for us to approach him but through Jesus our mediator. Neither our piety towards him, nor our liberality towards his saints, can render him our debtor, (yea, rather, the more we do for him, the more we are indebted to him); if we receive any thing from God, it must come as the purchase of Christ’s blood, and as the consequence of his prevailing intercession.]

2. By Christ as our head—

[It is “in Christ that all fulness dwells.” He has “received gifts for the rebellious,” and imparts them to whomsoever he will: and it is “out of his fulness that we must receive.” He is the head of the Church, and his people are his members; and as every member is nourished by its union with the head, so it is by grace derived from him that we are to increase with the increase of God^f.]

This important subject may TEACH us,

1. Contentment in ourselves—

[What cause can he possibly have for discontent, who has God for his God, and an express promise that all his need shall be supplied? God has not only engaged to give his people whatever they need, but on many occasions has interposed in a miraculous manner to fulfil his word. And, rather than violate his truth in any instance, he would feed them with

^e Rev. iii. 18.

^f Col. ii. 19.

bread from heaven, and water from a rock; he would make the ravens to bring them meat, or their barrel and cruse to supply them with an undiminished store. He has said that "the needy shall not always be forgotten, nor the expectation of the poor perish for ever." What if we have not all that flesh and blood might desire? shall we repine? Surely we should say with the Apostle, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content^g." We are like minors at present, and limited to the measure which our Father sees best for us: but in due time we shall receive the full inheritance. Shall persons so circumstanced give way to discontent? No: though poor as Lazarus, they should account themselves truly rich.]

2. Liberality to others—

[God condescends to acknowledge all that is given by us in charity as "lent to himself;" and he pledges himself to "repay it." He even prescribes the honouring of him with our first-fruits, as the means of securing to ourselves an abundant harvest, and of laying up in store a good foundation against the time to come, that we may lay hold on eternal life^h. We must not indeed suppose that our alms-deeds can *merit* any thing at the hand of God. Nevertheless, if they be a free-will offering, they are "an odour to him, and a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savour." Let then the bounty of God to us, whether experienced or expected, be a motive for liberality to our fellow-creatures. And let us gladly of our abundance minister to their necessities, that God in all things may be glorified through Christ Jesus.]

3. Devotedness to God—

[Has God given himself to us as *our* God, and shall not we give ourselves to him as his people? Does God grudge us no blessing which he can give, and shall we grudge him any service which we can render? Are his powers the only limit to his exertions for us, and shall we know any other limit to our zeal for him? Does he do such wonders for us for Christ's sake, and shall not we labour for Christ's sake to honour him? Yes, "the love of Christ shall constrain us" to live for him, and the mercies of God to us be the measure of the services which we shall yield to himⁱ.]

^g ver. 12.

^h Prov. iii. 9, 10. with 1 Tim. vi. 17, 18.

ⁱ Rom. xii. 1.

COLOSSIANS.

MMCLXVI.

PAUL'S COMMENDATION OF THE GOSPEL.

Col. i. 3—6. *We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the Gospel; which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth.*

“THE grace of God in truth!” What a beautiful description of the Gospel! It is grace: it is all grace, from first to last: it is the most stupendous grace that ever God vouchsafed to any creature, whether in heaven or on earth. It was marvellous grace to confer on angels such an exalted nature as they possess, together with all the glory and felicity of heaven. It was most astonishing grace also to form man in Paradise; to form him in the very image of his God; and to give him a promise, that if he should hold fast his integrity, both he and all his posterity should participate with the angels in all the blessedness they enjoy. But what is all this to the gift of God's only dear Son to bear the iniquities of fallen man, and, by his own obedience unto death, to restore man to his forfeited inheritance? This is emphatically called, “The Gospel of the grace of God:” and truly it does exhibit the grace of God in

such a view as no creature could ever have anticipated; and in such a view as must fill the whole creation, whether of men or angels, with the profoundest admiration, and gratitude, and love. This is the Gospel which ye “have heard;” which also, through the illuminating influence of the Spirit of God, many of you “know;” and the excellency of which may be seen,

I. By the effects produced in our hearts—

There are three effects mentioned, as produced in the converts of Colosse :

1. “Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ”—

[This is the first effect which the Gospel produces, wherever it is received into the heart. It reveals to us our need of a Saviour; and it holds forth the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, sent into the world to bear our sins, and to expiate our guilt by his atoning sacrifice, and thereby to reconcile us to our offended God. It discovers to us the fulness and suitableness of this salvation; and brings us to this Saviour, as our only hope. It leads every one to renounce altogether every other hope, and to trust entirely in the merits and mediation of this adorable Redeemer — — —]

2. Love to all the saints—

[This is the next effect produced on all. Through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are brought into a new family, of which Christ is the master: yea, we are incorporated into a new body, of which Christ is the head, and all the saints are members. I add further, we are all penetrated with one spirit; (for “he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit;”) and have thus a bond of union, which never did, nor could, exist before. The very instant we believe in Christ, we feel ourselves brought into this relation to all his believing people, whether they be separately known to us or not; and we have, from that moment, somewhat of the same sympathy with them, as every member of our body has with all the rest, the eye with the hand, and the hand with the foot — — —]

3. Hope of happiness in heaven—

[“The hope laid up for us in heaven” is that for which the Apostle principally gives thanks in the passage before us^a. But this, like the two foregoing principles, is wrought in the heart by the Gospel: by which, as St. Peter says, “we are

^a See the Greek. The faith and love are parenthetically inserted.

begotten again to a lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us^b." Yes, faith penetrates the highest heavens, and sees there crowns and kingdoms purchased by the blood of Christ, and promised to all who believe in him. An eternity of glory upon the very throne of God, the believer expects as his assured portion — — —]

But the excellency of the Gospel is further shewn,

II. By the effects produced on our lives—

"It brings forth fruit in all the world"—

[See the fruits of the Spirit as described by the Apostle: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance^c." There is not a grace that was in Christ Jesus himself, which the Gospel does not form in the souls of those who believe in him — — — "The discovery which it gives us of the glory of Christ transforms us into his image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of our God^d."]]

It does this invariably and universally—

[There is not a creature who receives the grace of God in truth, but experiences this effect upon his soul. It matters not whether he be the most civilized man on earth, or a poor savage Indian or Hottentot: he will, from the moment that he receives the Gospel, begin to bear the image of his heavenly Father "in righteousness and true holiness" — — — And the man who professes to believe in Christ, and does not bring forth the fruits of righteousness in his life and conversation, is a self-deceiver, and a hypocrite. "His faith is no better than the faith of devils;" and, if he die in his present state, his end shall be like theirs also: for God has decreed, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord^e" — — —]

TELL ME NOW, brethren,

1. Have we not ground to "give thanks for you?"

[Were you all reduced to the most abject state of poverty, and relieved by the Gospel to the utmost extent of your necessities, and enriched with all that the whole world could bestow; or were you all in dying circumstances, and restored to health by the Gospel; it were nothing, in comparison of the blessings ye have received (many of you at least) through the word ministered unto you. You have been brought by it from death to life, from sin to holiness, from hell to heaven.

^b 1 Pet. i. 4.

^c Gal. v. 22, 23.

^d 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^e Heb. xii. 14.

O! what inestimable blessings are these! — — — Say, then, whether those who have preached unto you the word of life have not reason to bless God for you, as the “seals of their ministry,” and as destined to be “their joy and crown of rejoicing in the presence of that Saviour” whom they have preached unto you^f? — — —]

2. Have we not encouragement, also, to “pray for you?”

[What will not God confer on those for whom he has already done so much? Surely there is not any thing which Omnipotence can effect, that shall not be bestowed upon you, in answer to the prayer of faith. See what Paul prayed for in behalf of the Colossians^g — — — That same prayer would I offer for you, and entreat all of you to offer for yourselves. “Open your mouths wide, and God will fill them.” “Be not straitened in yourselves; for ye are not straitened in him.” Only ask in faith; and “according to your faith it shall be done unto you.”]

3. Is there not, however, ground for lamentation, on account of some amongst you?

[Would to God I could say that the change here described had been wrought on all! But there are many of you, I fear, who still remain in your unconverted state; and who, notwithstanding the Gospel has so long been ministered unto you, are yet strangers to the faith, and love, and hope, which it forms in the hearts of those who truly receive it; yes, and whose tempers and dispositions are widely different from the fruits which the Gospel is sent to produce. Dear brethren, I pray you study the Gospel more: pray over it more: beg of God to make it “the rod of his strength,” and to effect by it in you all that it wrought in the Colossian Church, and all that it is ordained to work in all the world — — —]

^f 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20.

^g ver. 9—14.

MMCLXVII.

PRAYER FOR GROWTH IN GRACE.

Col. i. 9—13. *We do not cease to pray for you that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the*

Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light : who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.

UNIVERSAL benevolence will begin to shew itself wherever Christianity gains a just ascendancy. This is particularly observable in the prayers which the Apostle offered for others ; the fervour and fullness of which clearly proved, that they proceeded from a heart fraught with love, and deeply impressed with the excellency of those blessings which are provided for us in the Gospel. He confined not his attention to the welfare of a few with whom he might happen to sojourn ; but extended it to the whole Church, as well to those whom he had never seen, as to those amongst whom he had ministered. He needed only to be informed that a work of grace was begun in any persons, and he instantly felt an union of heart with them, and took a lively interest in all that concerned them. This remark is strongly exemplified in the prayer before us. He had heard of the blessed state of the Colossian Church ; and, from the instant he had received the glad tidings, he remembered that people in all his stated prayers : and, in the passage before us, he tells them what he prayed for on their behalf. He desired that they might advance

I. In the knowledge of God's will—

[The “knowledge of God's revealed will” is the foundation of all acceptable obedience : and every Christian must of necessity be in some degree endued with it. But he will not be satisfied with a scanty measure of it : he wishes to be “filled with it,” so that it may engage all the faculties of his mind. Not that he can rest in a speculative view of Divine truth, however clear or comprehensive it may be : the knowledge which he covets, is a practical and experimental knowledge ; a knowledge that diffuses “a spiritual savour” over his soul, and enables him to conduct himself, “with all wisdom,” as well in his secret conflicts with sin, as in the public exercises of his duty to God and man.

Such then was the Apostle's first request for the converts at Colosse : he desired, that, as they already had some knowledge of God's will, so they might be “filled” with it, enjoying at

the same time its sweet savour, and its practical influence, “in all wisdom, and spiritual understanding.”

And should not such be our prayer also for ourselves? Let us not forget, that, while we aspire after divine knowledge, we must chiefly seek that which brings a feast to the soul, and endues it with a nice and accurate discernment of good and evil.]

II. In obedience to his commands—

[The more enlarged views the Christian has of divine truth, the more studious will he be to fulfil the will of God. And in his endeavours after holiness he will propose to himself the highest *measure* of obedience, and the noblest *end*. He will not limit himself to the rules prescribed by men; nor will he aim merely at obtaining eternal happiness: but he will consider the relation he bears to God, and the obligations he has received from him, and the expectations which he has of future benefits; and will endeavour to “walk worthy of” such a Father, such a Redeemer, such an unspeakable Benefactor. He will resemble a dutiful and affectionate servant, who does not merely consider what he *must* do in order to escape censure, and receive his wages, but what will please his Master. He inquires with himself, What will please my God? *That* is the great object of his ambition: *that* is the spring of his activity: and with that view he endeavours to be “fruitful,” not in some good works only, but “in every good work,” however difficult or self-denying.

Suited to these dispositions was the Apostle’s prayer: he desired for the Colossians what he knew they desired for themselves, even “that they might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work.” And it is certain, that in proportion as we have attained a just knowledge of God’s will, we shall desire, both for ourselves and others, an increase of righteousness and true holiness.]

III. In the enjoyment of his presence—

[“The knowledge of God” seems to be different from “the knowledge of his will,” that has been before mentioned: the former relates to a view of his truth, and the latter to the enjoyment of his presence. In this sense the latter is not a mere repetition, but a blessing intimately connected with a holy life. Whom will God meet, and unto whom will he reveal himself, but “him that rejoiceth in working righteousness^a?” Yes; there are manifestations which such persons shall receive, and such manifestations as the world can form no idea of^b. God will “shed abroad his love in the hearts” of his

^a Isai. lxiv. 5.

^b John xiv. 21, 23.

people; and will testify to them their adoption into his family, and seal them unto the day of redemption. How desirable is this for every saint! and how rich a recompence is it for any self-denial he may exercise in the path of duty! Would to God that all professing Christians might experience this; and that not a single day might ever pass, in which they cannot say with the beloved Disciple, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ^c!"

IV. In submission to his dispensations—

[The more any person lives in the enjoyment of God, and a diligent performance of his will, the more must he expect to be hated and persecuted by an ungodly world. But under all his trials he must be "patient:" to whatever length of time they be protracted, he must be "long-suffering:" nor must he merely possess his soul in patience; he must have it blended "with joyfulness," regarding it as his honour and his happiness that he is counted worthy to suffer shame for his Redeemer's sake^d. But "who is sufficient for these things?" It is not possible for feeble man to maintain such a conduct, unless he be "strengthened with all might" by the Holy Ghost: yea, there must be such an exertion of omnipotence as will serve for a bright display of "his glorious power;" nor can any thing less than this effect so great a work.

Here then again we see the suitableness of the Apostle's prayer: for if we cannot serve the Lord without participating his cross, or sustain by our own power the trials that will come upon us, what alternative remains, but either to abandon our profession, or to implore such help from God as shall make us more than conquerors over all?]

V. In thankfulness to him for his mercies—

[There can be no state, however afflictive, in which a Christian ought not to abound in thanksgivings to God. The Israelites, to whom he divided Canaan by lot, were unspeakably indebted to him: but how are *they* indebted, to whom he has given an "inheritance among the saints in light;" even in heaven, where they dwell in the immediate presence of their God! For this they are rendered "meet;" (for it is impossible that they can enjoy it, if they possess not a meetness for it:) their heavenly Father has "delivered them from the power of darkness," even as he did Lot from Sodom, and the Israelites from Egypt, with a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm: he has moreover "translated them into the kingdom of his dear Son," and brought them into a cheerful and unreserved obedience to his will. Must not *they* then

^c 1 John i. 3.

^d Acts v. 41.

give glory to their God? What if they be burning at the stake, ought they not to rejoice that God has rescued them from hell, and that they are entering on a state of uninterrupted everlasting happiness?

Surely no Christian should rest short of this attainment: but we should all unite in wrestling with our God, till he pour out his Spirit upon us, and form us to the model which was here proposed for the Colossian converts.]

INFER—

1. How glorious are the Christian's privileges!

[Did the Apostle incessantly ask of God what God was not willing to bestow? No; "if we opened our mouth wide, he would fill it;" and all these graces should abound in us, to the praise and glory of our God. What then must the Christian be, in whom these things are found! O believer, aim not at low things; but aspire after the highest measures of wisdom, purity, and joy.]

2. How dependent are we upon our God!

[It is not at our first commencement only of a religious course that we depend on God, but to the latest hour of our lives. We can have no knowledge, holiness, or joy, but as we receive it from him. Let us then make our requests known to him, and depend on him for all seasonable supplies of grace and strength.]

3. How great is the benefit of intercession!

[We certainly are not sufficiently apprised of this. But when we recollect the intercessions of Abraham for Sodom, of Lot for Zoar, of Moses for Israel, how can we be so remiss in this duty! Let us incessantly plead for each other, knowing that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.]

MMCLXVIII.

THE GLORY OF CHRIST.

Col. i. 16—18. *By him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the Head of the body, the Church: who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence.*

THE pre-eminence he *must* have: the pre-eminence he *shall* have: his title to it is indisputable: and it is at the peril of our souls to withhold it from him. Do you ask, Of whom we speak thus? I answer, Of the Lord Jesus Christ; of whom the Apostles evidently thought that they could never speak enough. Let the Apostle Paul but touch upon his name, and he launches forth in his praise, and scarcely knows when to stop. Mark the passage before us. The Apostle had informed the Colossians what prayers and thanksgivings he daily poured forth before God, in their behalf. He especially praised God for “delivering them from the power of darkness, and translating them into the kingdom of his dear Son:” and having thus, accidentally as it were, mentioned the Lord Jesus, he goes on to expatiate on his transcendent excellencies, not only as the Redeemer of his people, but as “the image of the invisible God, and the first-born (that is, the Heir and Lord) of the whole creation.” And, lest it should be thought that he was speaking too highly of the despised and persecuted Jesus, he proceeds yet further to establish his claim to these high titles, by declaring what he had done for the world at large, and for the Church in particular; and that the pre-eminence thus given him was no more than his due.

In opening to you this sublime passage, I shall be led to shew,

I. On what grounds pre-eminence is due to Christ—

In all things he must take the lead. This priority is due to him, on account of,

1. His personal dignity—

[He, though born into the world a little infant, after that the world had existed four thousand years, was the Creator of all, the Preserver of all, the End of all. “By Him were all things created,” both in heaven and earth, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities or powers. Whether they be “visible,” as the heavenly bodies and the earth, with the things upon it; or whether they be “invisible,” as the holy angels and the souls of men; he formed them all: whatever rank or order they possess in their respective spheres,

(for it seems that in heaven, as well as on earth and in hell, there are beings of different ranks and orders,) from his creating hand they have derived their existence, and from his sovereign will their station. Nor is there any thing in the whole creation which is not upheld by him. He directs the stars in their orbits, and causes the sun and moon to know their appointed seasons. The smallest insect too, which is so small as to be invisible to the naked eye, is as much noticed and supplied by him, as if it were the only work of his hands. For himself too, as the supreme God, he made these things: and all of them, whether wittingly or unwittingly, subserve his glory. If we could suppose that God had delegated to him the work of creating every thing, and of upholding it in its order, (though, as he was the Creator of *all* things, he could not be himself a creature,) still it would be impossible for God to devolve on him the honour of being the *end* of all things: *that* is incapable of being communicated to any creature: it is the prerogative of God alone: nor could he divest himself of it, without giving a licence to his creatures to alienate from him the most essential rights of Godhead.

Behold, then, the Lord Jesus Christ, in this his personal dignity, as the author and end of all; and then say, whether he be not entitled to a pre-eminence above all? The highest archangel has no such claims. In respect of these things, he is on a level with the meanest clod of earth; and must unite with all the rest of the creation in giving glory to our blessed Lord.]

2. His official excellency—

[In his mediatorial capacity he is no less glorious. He is “the Head of the Church, which is his body:” he is the *Head of vital influence*, from which every member receives his supply of grace; and he is the *Head and Representative* of all his members, who at this very moment “are risen, as it were, in him, and sitting in heavenly places in him^a.” This I conceive is meant by his being “the beginning, the first-born from the dead.” It is true that he existed before all; and that he was the most distinguished amongst those who have risen from the dead; having raised himself by his own power, whilst all others have owed their restoration to life to the miraculous exertion of God’s power. But, as he is called “the first-born of the whole creation,” not because he was himself created, but because the rights of the first-born all centred in him, and he was, as mediator, the *Heir and Lord* of all^b; so his being called “the beginning, the first-born from the dead,” imports, that in his risen state the rights of primo-

^a Eph. ii. 6.

^b Heb. i. 2.

geniture still attach to him; and that he is, in heaven, the Head and Representative of all his members, who, in due time, shall participate the glory which he there enjoys. This is what the Apostle elsewhere distinctly states; saying, “Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become *the first-fruits of them that slept*^c.”

Consider him, then, in this his mediatorial character; and say, whether he does not in this view, also, justly claim the pre-eminence? To him are all in heaven, and all on earth, indebted for their happiness; even as the moon and stars, no less than this terrestrial globe, are indebted to the sun for all the light which they enjoy. The angels around the throne, no less than ourselves, are all collected under him as their Head^d; and, through his all-powerful aid, retain the blessedness, of which we, in due season, are destined to participate. Yes, in heaven, at least, is he glorified as he ought to be; for “in that celestial city the glory of God does lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof^e.”]

But as, in ascribing pre-eminence to him, we must be active, let us consider,

II. In what way and manner it should be assigned him—

It is not sufficient that we “call him, Lord, Lord:” we must honour him, “not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth.” We must give him the pre-eminence,

1. In our regards—

[Go up to heaven, and see how he is honoured there. There is he “as a Lamb that has been slain;” and there, “as a Lamb, he sits upon his throne;” and all the hosts of heaven, those who never fell, no less than those he has redeemed, are singing day and night, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing^f.” Now, thus it should be on earth. We should be so filled with views of his excellency, and so penetrated with a sense of his love, that the whole creation should be a mere blank in comparison of him. Parents, children, life itself, should be of no account, where his honour is concerned. What the Psalmist said, should be the continual language of our hearts, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee^g.” As for the poor things of time and sense, we should

^c 1 Cor. xv. 20.

^d Eph. i. 10.

^e Rev. xxi. 23.

^f Rev. v. 11—13.

^g Ps. lxxiii. 25.

be ashamed that they have ever been suffered to occupy one single thought, except in subserviency to him. In a word, the Lord Jesus should be to us now, what he will be in a better world—our light, our life, our joy, our All.]

2. In our affiance—

[As God, who created all things, he is able, and, as our living Head, who is interested in our welfare, he is willing, to do all that our utmost necessities can require. Stretch your imagination to the uttermost; and think whether there be any guilt too deep for his blood to expiate, or any corruption too inveterate for his Spirit to subdue. To limit him, either in relation to his power or his grace, or to rely on any other besides him, were to deny his Godhead, and to cast him down from his mediatorial throne. Our whole soul should go forth to him; our every want be cast on him: and fear, except that which is truly filial, should be dismissed, and find no more place in our bosoms than it does in heaven. O, the holy glorying that becomes us! Rise to the occasion, my beloved brethren; and rest assured, that he who created and preserves the universe can new-create and preserve you; and he who redeemed the Church with his blood, and united it to himself as his own body, can redeem, and sanctify, and save, yea, “save to the very uttermost, all those who come unto God by him.”]

3. In our services—

[That was an unanswerable appeal which was made to the Jewish rulers, “Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye^h.” We should know no rule of conduct but his revealed will: nor, in the execution of his will, is there any limit to be assigned. If we had a thousand lives, they should all be devoted to him: nor, if we could die a thousand deaths, should they be accounted too much to be endured for him. “His love should constrain us,” and carry us away as a mighty torrent in his service. It is said of the angels in heaven, that “they do his commandments, hearkening to the voice of his wordⁱ,” and so should it be with us: the very first intimation of his will should call into activity our utmost powers: nor should we ever rest, till we can say of the work committed to us, “It is finished.”]

Suffer ye now, brethren, a word of EXHORTATION—

1. Contemplate the excellency of your incarnate God—

^h Acts iv. 19. and v. 29.

ⁱ Ps. ciii. 20.

[Survey the heavens, with all the diversified and stupendous bodies contained in them: and inspect the minutest insect, which nothing but the greatest magnifying power can render visible: and see, both in the one and in the other, his creating hand, and his preserving power. Then say with yourselves, ‘The Maker of all these things is my Friend, my Beloved, yea, my very Head, one with me; not merely as a subject is one with his political head, the king, but as any member of my body is with my own head. Not any powers which I myself possess are more used for the good of my own members, than all the powers of this Saviour are for me. For me he became incarnate: for me he died upon the cross: for me he rose, and ascended up where he was before: for me he orders every thing in heaven and earth: for me “he has prepared a place” in the mansions of his Father: and for me is he shortly coming again, to “take me to himself, that where he is I may be also.” Shall I cease for a moment to think of him? Shall any thing for a moment stand in competition with him? My dear brethren, let him have the pre-eminence: let him be seated on the throne of your hearts: let every Dagon fall before him: and let him “be all your salvation and all your desire.”]

2. Awake to the performance of your duties towards him—

[Are you not ashamed that this adorable Saviour has held so low a place in your esteem, that even the most contemptible things that can be imagined have had a pre-eminence above him? There is not a base lust which has not more power to sway you, than love to him, or zeal for his glory. There is not a vanity which you have not more desired, nor an object whom you have not more feared, nor a device you have not more relied upon, than he. Would you not have thought it impossible, that a Being so glorious in himself, and so gracious unto you, should ever be so despised by you, as he has been? O! humble yourselves before him; and now set yourselves with all diligence to honour and to glorify his name. Let it no longer be a doubt, either in your own minds or in the minds of any that behold you, who has the pre-eminence in your souls. Give yourselves wholly to him: live altogether for him: let your daily and hourly inquiry be, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” In short, endeavour to begin the life of heaven whilst you are yet upon earth. When once you are there, “you will follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth^k.” Follow him now: follow the footsteps which he trod on earth: follow him, in your affections, to the

^k Rev. xiv. 4.

highest heavens¹: and look forward to the time when he, who has ascended as your Forerunner, shall come again to take you to himself, and “seat you with him upon his throne, as he sitteth on his Father’s throne.”]

¹ Col. iii. 1, 2.

MMCLXIX.

THE FULNESS OF CHRIST.

Col. i. 19. *It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell.*

IT is scarcely possible to read with attention the Epistles of St. Paul, and not to be struck with the energetic manner in which he expatiates on the glory and excellency of Christ, not merely when he professedly treats of his work and offices, but oftentimes when he only incidentally, as it were, makes mention of his name. We notice this particularly in the passage before us, where he puts forth all the powers of language to exalt his character to the uttermost.

Confining our attention to the expression in the text, we shall shew,

I. What is that fulness which resides in Christ—

There is in him,

1. An essential fulness—

[Christ, though apparently a mere man, was the first cause and last end of all things, even “God over all, blessed for ever^a.” His people are said to be “filled with all the fulness of God^b,” but “in him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead^c.” Men are made to enjoy all the gifts and graces of God’s Spirit; and, in this sense, are “partakers of the Divine nature^d,” but Christ was really “God manifest in the flesh^e.” The Godhead dwelt in him, not symbolically as in the temple^f, or spiritually as in us^g, but truly, “bodily^h,” substantially. The fulness of the Godhead was essentially his from all eternity; nor was he any more dependent on the Father than the Father was on him: but his assumption of our nature was the result of the Father’s counsels, and the fruit of the Father’s loveⁱ.]

^a ver. 16. with Rom. ix. 5.

^b Eph. iii. 19.

^c Col. ii. 9. in this place it is not Θεοῦ, but Θεότητος.

^d 2 Pet. i. 4.

^e 1 Tim. iii. 16. John i. 1, 14.

^f Ps. lxxx. 1.

^g 2 Cor. vi. 16.

^h σωματικῶς, Col. ii. 9.

ⁱ John iii. 16. 1 John iv. 10.

2. A communicative fulness—

[He has *a fulness of merit to justify the most ungodly*. Christ, by his obedience unto death, perfected whatever was necessary for the restoring of us to the Divine favour. His atonement was satisfactory; his righteousness was complete. Under the Mosaic law, there were many sins for which no sacrifice was provided: but the one sacrifice of Christ was all-sufficient; and “*all* who believe in him, are justified from *all* things^k,” his “*righteousness shall be unto them, and upon them all*!” and, however great their iniquities have been, they shall be without spot or blemish in the sight of God^m.

He has also *a fulness of grace to sanctify the most polluted*. With him was “the residue of the Spiritⁿ.” The oil that was poured out upon him was to descend to the meanest of his members^o. “He was constituted Head over the Church, that he might fill all things^p,” and he received gifts on purpose that he might bestow them on the rebellious^q. His grace is still sufficient to support us in all temptation^r, and to sanctify us throughout in body, soul, and spirit^s. No lusts are so inveterate as eventually to withstand its influence^t; nor is any heart so vile but it shall be “purged by him from all its filthiness, and from all its idols^u.”]

It will not be presumptuous, or unprofitable, if we inquire,

II. Why it pleased the Father that all fulness should reside in Christ?

Many reasons might be mentioned; but the principal of them may be comprehended under the two following:

1. For the honour of his own Son—

[As Jesus was to become a sacrifice for us, it was meet that he should have all the honour of our salvation. Accordingly we are told, that God exalted him on purpose that at his name every knee should bow, and that every tongue should confess him to be the sovereign Lord of all^x. By this appointment of Christ to be the head of vital influence to the Church, all are necessitated to come to him, and to “receive out of his fulness^y,” and to live by faith upon him from day to day^z.

^k Acts xiii. 39.^l Rom. iii. 22.^m Eph. v. 27.ⁿ Mal. ii. 15.^o Ps. cxxxiii. 2.^p Eph. i. 22, 23. and iv. 10.^q Ps. lxxviii. 18.^r 2 Cor. xii. 9.^s 1 Thess. v. 23.^t Luke viii. 2.^u Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.^x Phil. ii. 9—11.^y John i. 16.^z Gal. ii. 20.

All are necessitated to depend on him for a constant communication of grace and peace, as much as to depend on the sun for the periodical returns of light and heat. Hence, both on earth and in heaven^a, all are constrained to give him all the glory of their salvation. No one can ascribe any thing to his own goodness; seeing that all are cleansed in the blood of Christ, and arrayed in the spotless robe of his righteousness^b: nor can any glory in his own strength; since no one has any sufficiency in himself even to think a good thought^c; and much less to renew his own soul. The merit that justifies, and the grace that sanctifies, are all of him: “*he is ALL, and IN ALL^d:*” and he is made ALL unto us, *on purpose* that all may be compelled to glory in him alone^e.]

2. For the security of our souls—

[There never was but one man to whom a stock was entrusted; and he soon (if we may so speak) became a bankrupt. And if *we* had grace committed to us in such a manner as to be left wholly to ourselves for the improvement of it, we should lose it again, as he did. For our more abundant security therefore the Father treasured up all fulness in his Son; that, however our broken cisterns might fail, there might be an inexhaustible fountain secured to us. In this view we are reminded, that “God has laid help upon One that is mighty^f,” and that “because he liveth we shall live also^g.”

We are further told by the Apostle, that this appointment of Christ to be our head, with the consequent necessity of living by faith on him, and of receiving out of his fulness, was ordained of God on purpose that the promises might be finally secured to all the seed^h; and he himself declares, that this very constitution of things was the one ground of his assurance respecting the salvation of his soul: “Our life is hid with Christ in God: and (therefore) when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we also shall appear with him in gloryⁱ.”]

This passage, duly considered, **SHEWS** us clearly,

1. The excellency of faith—

[How can we receive any thing from Christ except by faith? No other method can be conceived whereby we can obtain any thing at his hands. But faith interests us in all that he has done and suffered for us, and in all that he has received to communicate unto us. It is that whereby alone we can “draw water out of the wells of salvation:” it is that,

^a Gal. vi. 14. Rev. v. 12, 13.

^b Isai. lxi. 10.

^c 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^d Col. iii. 11.

^e 1 Cor. i. 30, 31.

^f Ps. lxxxix. 19.

^g John xiv. 19.

^h Rom. iv. 16.

ⁱ Col. iii. 3, 4.

in the exercise of which we may be “filled with all the fulness of God.” Let all of us then cultivate this precious grace, and, as the best means of receiving every other blessing, let us pray with the Apostles, “Lord, increase our faith.”]

2. The evil of self-righteousness—

[Self-righteousness is a practical denial of the assertion in our text. It refuses to Christ the honour put upon him by the Father, and ascribes to *self* that which belongs to him alone. And shall it be thought a small evil to rob Christ of his glory? Shall it appear a light matter to thwart the eternal counsels of the Father, and to set ourselves in direct opposition to his blessed will? Let none henceforth suppose, that the trusting in our own wisdom, righteousness, or strength, is a venial offence: for surely God will be jealous for his own honour, and the honour of his dear Son; and will look with scorn on every proud Pharisee, while he will receive with boundless compassion the vilest of repenting publicans.]

3. The true nature of evangelical piety—

[Vital godliness, especially under the Christian dispensation, consists in a conformity of mind to the revealed will of our heavenly Father. Now in no respect is that will more sacred than in reference to the glory designed for Christ; nor is there any thing wherein a conformity to it is more characteristic of true and eminent piety. In one word then, the true Christian is well pleased that all fulness should dwell in Christ: if he might have some fulness in himself, he would rather have it in Christ, that he might receive all from him. Every part of salvation is the more endeared to him, on account of its coming through that channel: and it is his supreme felicity in this world, as it will be also in the world to come, to owe every thing to that adorable Saviour, and to glorify him in all, and for all.

Beloved, let this be your daily experience. Let it be your delight to live upon Christ's fulness; and it shall be his delight to communicate to you all spiritual and eternal blessings.]

MMCLXX.

SANCTIFICATION THE END OF REDEMPTION.

Col. i. 21—23. *You, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight: if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel.*

OF all the subjects that can occupy the human mind, there is not one so great and glorious as that of redemption through the incarnation and death of God's only-begotten Son. It is that which occupies incessantly the heavenly hosts; and which the Apostle Paul, whatever be his more immediate subject of discourse, reverts to on every occasion: and when he has, however incidentally, touched upon it, he scarcely knows how, or when, to leave it. This very strongly appears in the passage now before us. Having in the beginning of this chapter thanked God for bringing the Colossians to the knowledge of his Gospel, and informed them what were the peculiar blessings which in his daily prayers he sought for in their behalf, and what thanksgivings he constantly offered up, especially for that which they had experienced in being "translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son," he launches forth into the praises of the Lord Jesus Christ for all that he had done in the creation, preservation, and redemption of the world, and particularly for his redeeming love, as manifested to, and exercised upon, the Colossian converts. But, as they were converts from the Gentile world, we may fitly consider his address to them as delivered also to us; and may take occasion from it to shew,

I. What the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us—

1. Our state was awful in the extreme—

["We were alienated from God, and enemies to him in our mind by wicked works." This is no less true of us than of the idolatrous Gentiles: for though by calling ourselves Christians we have professed a regard for God and his Christ, we have not really sought our happiness in God: we have not even desired his favour, or used any means to obtain it. We have been contented to live at a distance from him, to put the very remembrance of him far from us, and to seek our happiness in things which had no proper tendency to endear either him to us, or us to him. However observant we may have been of outward forms, we have had no pleasure in communion with him. The exercises of prayer and praise have rather been an irksome task, than occupations in which we found our chief delight. And if at any time we have had opportunities

of becoming better acquainted with God and with his holy will, we have not been forward to avail ourselves of them: and if instruction on the subject of his Gospel has been proffered to us, we have rather turned away from it, as distasteful to us, than listened to it as pleasing to our souls. The very light which would have revealed him to us, has been offensive to us; and we have turned our eyes from it, as bringing to our view an object, whose presence was to us a source of pain.

Nor is this all. We have been "enemies to him;" yea, "enemies to him in our mind:" we have had a decided aversion to his law: instead of contemplating it as "holy, just, and good," we have viewed it as imposing a yoke that could not be endured. And this hatred to it has been proved by our actual rebellion against it: our "wicked works" have shewn clearly enough that the service of sin was more congenial with our minds than the service of our God. As for all the sublime duties which it inculcates, we have lived in a wilful neglect of them: and of innumerable evils which it forbids, we have lived in the daily and habitual commission — — Such had been the state of the Colossians in their time of unregeneracy; and such is the state of every child of man, till he is renewed by God in the spirit of his mind.]

2. But the Lord Jesus Christ has interposed to deliver us from it—

["He has reconciled us to God in the body of his flesh through death." Yes: the Son of God himself has left the bosom of his Father, and assumed our flesh, that in the very nature which had sinned he might bear the penalty that was due to sin, and expiate our guilt by his own blood. The sacrifices under the law were substituted in the place of the offender, and they surrendered up their life as an atonement for his sins: and through the death of the victim in his stead, the sinner was reconciled unto his God. So the Lord Jesus Christ has offered himself a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world; and effected reconciliation for all who believe in him. No longer does God look with anger upon his enemies, when with penitential sorrow they implore mercy for Christ's sake. Not one of their trespasses will he ever impute to them: their iniquities, how great or numerous soever they may have been, are "blotted out by him as a morning cloud," and "cast behind his back into the very depths of the sea." This we are authorized to declare: for "God has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation," and commanded us to proclaim to the whole universe, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them^a."]]

^a 2 Cor. v. 18, 19.

But, that we may not be deceived by a partial view of this mystery I will pass on from what he has done, to shew,

II. What was his ultimate design in doing it—

Whatever compassion the Lord Jesus felt for our fallen race, and however desirous he was to deliver us from destruction, he had other objects in view, that were not a whit less dear to him, and without which indeed his dying for us could never have prevailed to make us happy.

The restoration of our souls to the Divine image was in his more immediate contemplation—

Man by the Fall was despoiled of holiness, as well as happiness; and without a restoration to the former, could never repossess the latter. Indeed God could never re-admit him to his presence: nor could he, if admitted into heaven, find any satisfaction in the sight of a holy God, or any pleasure in the employments which constitute the felicity of the heavenly hosts. To restore man therefore to the image which he had lost, was one great end of Christ's incarnation and death; as St. Paul has said, "He gave himself for us to redeem us" not from punishment merely, but "from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works^b." In another passage the Apostle comes more immediately to the point, and says, "Christ has loved his Church, and given himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish^c." This passage shews, that the expressions in my text relate not to our justification before God, but to the *sanctification* of our souls; to which Christ has had a view in all that he has done and suffered for us.]

And this he will effect for all whom he reconciles to God—

[He will impart of his Spirit to the soul: he will strengthen the soul for all its conflicts: he will enable all his people to "mortify their earthly members," and to "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts:" nor will he ever cease to work in them, till he has transformed them into his own image, and can "present them unblameable and unreprouable in the sight of God." We are not indeed to suppose that he

^b Tit. ii. 14.

^c Eph. v. 25—27.

will so renew them as to render them perfectly sinless; for the flesh will continue to lust against the Spirit, as well as the Spirit against the flesh, to the latest hour of our lives^d: but he will so make the spiritual principle triumphant in the soul, as to leave in us no *allowed* sin, and so that he may present us to God as “Israelites indeed in whom there is no guile.”]

In this, however, there must be the concurrence and co-operation of the believer himself; as will appear whilst I shew,

III. What is necessary to be done on our part, in order to secure the blessings which he has obtained for us—

Those who are addicted to system would alter the translation here, and read it, not, “*if* ye continue,” but “*since* ye continue.” But this is only one instance of many, wherein the advocates for human systems betray their determination to make every thing bend to their views. The translators of our Scriptures would indulge no such unhallowed partiality. They would in no case wrest the Scriptures to make them favour a party in the Church. They maintained a child-like simplicity; and with scrupulous fidelity laboured to transmit to us the Scriptures in a perfect agreement with the inspired original. Of the propriety of the translation in this place I have no doubt: it is the very language of the Scriptures, in a thousand other places as well as this; and it speaks to us a most important truth, namely, that we never can be presented blameless before God at last, unless we continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel.

1. It was by faith that we first obtained an interest in Christ—

[It would have been to no purpose that Christ had died to reconcile us to God, if we had not on our part believed in him as our Mediator and Redeemer. The unbelieving world who die in their sins, are rather plunged the deeper into perdition, than delivered from it, by the intervention of Christ. Their rejection of him has aggravated their guilt exceedingly:

^d Gal. v. 17.

and the word preached to them in his name, will be “a savour of death unto all, to whom it is not a savour of life.” The receiving of him into our hearts by faith, put us into possession of all the blessings which he had purchased for us.]

2. By the continued exercise of the same faith we must ultimately secure the harvest of which we have reaped the first-fruits—

[“As we have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so we must walk in him^e.” We must “continue in the faith grounded and settled, and not be moved away from the hope of the Gospel.” It is a fact, that many do make shipwreck of the faith. The Scriptures abound with instances of it: and we also shall feel many temptations, both from without and from within, to follow their sad example. Like the stony-ground hearers, we may through the influence of persecution “fall away:” or, as in the case of the thorny-ground hearers, the good seed in us may be so choked by the cares and pleasures of this life, as to “bring forth no fruit to perfection.” And, from whatever source the defection arises, “if we turn back, we turn back unto perdition,” and “God’s soul shall have no pleasure in us.” Would we then be “presented faultless before the presence of God’s glory with exceeding joy^f?” we must hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering:” we must be more and more “grounded” in the faith by a constant exercise of it on every occasion: we must be so firmly “settled” in it, that a man may as well attempt to pluck the sun from the firmament, as to shake either our faith or hope. This is the way to “endure unto the end;” and it is in this way only that we can fulfil that salutary injunction, “Look to yourselves, that ye lose not the things which ye have wrought, but that ye receive a full reward^g.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Are there any who are here yet unreconciled to God?

[O! think what a mercy it is that God’s wrath has not broken forth against you to your utter and everlasting destruction! Think how many of the human race are now suffering the penalty due to their sins in hopeless sorrows, and in torments of which we have no conception. Do not, I entreat you, let the efforts made for your salvation be in vain. Let not “Christ have died in vain;” and “receive not the grace of God in vain:” but “to-day, whilst it is called to-day, harden not your hearts, lest you provoke God to swear in his wrath that you shall never enter into his rest.”]

^e Col. ii. 6, 7.

^f Jude, ver. 24.

^g 2 John, ver. 8.

2. Are there here those whom God has reconciled to himself?

[How can you ever adore him as you ought to do? Can you reflect on the means he has used for your redemption; can you reflect on his laying your iniquities on the person of his only dear Son, and not bless him? The wonder is, how you can find a moment for any other employment; and that you are not, like the lame man whom Peter and John healed, leaping, and dancing, and praising God every day and all the day long.

But, if this were the frame of your mind, I should still point you to a more excellent way of glorifying your heavenly Benefactor. You have seen that the Lord Jesus, in dying for you, sought “to present you to God holy, and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight:” let his object then in redeeming you be the one object at which you shall aim through the remainder of your lives. And remember, that it is not sufficient that you be unblameable and unreprouvable *before men*; you must be so “in the sight of God” also, even of that “God who searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins.” Let your secret walk with God be such as he will approve. Let your every temper, and disposition, and habit, mark the friendship that subsists between God and you. And let every day be so spent, as if at the close of it you expected your soul to be required of you, and to be presented by your Saviour to your reconciled God.]

MMCLXXI.

CHRIST IN US, THE HOPE OF GLORY.

Col. i. 27. *Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

THE Gospel is a “mystery;” “the riches” of which are unsearchable, and “the glory” incomprehensible. But the sum and substance of it is contained in few words: it is briefly this; “Christ in us, the hope of glory.” In the margin of our Bibles it is translated, “Christ *among* us, the hope of glory;” and each of these translations has its zealous advocates: but we may easily and properly comprehend both, by saying, that Christ is the hope of glory to us,

I. As revealed in the Scriptures—

The way to the tree of life is guarded by a flaming sword · and there is no access to it for fallen man,

but by Christ, as the appointed Mediator. He, as St. Paul says, “is our hope^a,” and through him there is hope for all: through him,

1. As a dying Saviour—

[It is he who has made atonement for our sins, and “reconciled us to God by the blood of his cross.” Through his vicarious sacrifice every sinner in the universe may come to God; seeing that “he is a propitiation, not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” However great the debt which we owe to Divine justice, we may regard it all as paid by our Divine Surety; and may assure ourselves, that, if we believe in Christ, “there neither is, nor ever shall be, any condemnation to us” — — —]

2. As a living Saviour—

[It is worthy of particular observation, that in the Holy Scriptures a greater stress is laid upon the life of Christ in glory, than upon his death upon the cross. St. Peter speaks of him as *our hope*, in this particular view: “God *raised him up, and gave him glory*, that our faith and hope might be in God^b.” St. Paul, too, represents the life of Christ as more efficacious for our salvation than his death: “Who is he that condemneth? it is Christ that died, yea, *rather*, that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us^c.” And still more forcibly, he says in another place, “If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, *much more*, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life^d.” In heaven we view the Lord Jesus as our advocate with the Father, maintaining continually our peace with him; when we, by our innumerable departures from him, should entirely destroy all our hope of final acceptance with him. We view Him, also, as the one source of all spiritual blessings, the first cause of all the good that is in us, the protector of his people from all their enemies, and “the finisher” of the work of which he has been “the author.” It is from this view of him that the weakest of his people is enabled to say, “Because he lives, I shall live also” — — —]

But he is our hope yet more especially,

II. As dwelling in the heart—

All that the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us would be in vain, if he did not also work effectually in us. But this he does,

^a 1 Tim. i. 1.

^c Rom. viii. 34.

^b 1 Pet. i. 21.

^d Rom. v. 10.

1. Purifying our hearts from sin—

[Our blessed Lord is said to “dwell in us^e,” and to be “one with us, even as he and his Father are one^f.” Now it is a fact, that his people are universally, and without exception, holy. And whence comes this? Is it from any power of their own? No; it is from the mighty working of his power in us: as the Apostle says, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me^g.” Were we “separate from him, we could do nothing^h,” but, through the mighty working of his power in us, we “die unto sin and live unto righteousness,” and attain a meetness for our heavenly inheritance.]

2. Transforming us into his blessed image—

[This, after all, is the crowning work of redemption. Till this is effected, we may well stand in doubt both of ourselves and others. St. Paul, addressing the Galatian converts, says, “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again *until Christ be formed in you*, I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for *I stand in doubt of you*ⁱ.” To say the truth, till this is effected, nothing is done to any good purpose. It is not Christ on the cross, nor Christ in heaven, no, nor Christ in the heart, that will save us, unless his image be there formed in righteousness and true holiness. This is strongly declared by the Apostle Paul, in the third chapter of this epistle; where he says, “Put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him; where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond, nor free; but Christ (that is, *the image of Christ*) is all, and in all^k.” But, when this great work is wrought, we need not fear: we may entertain a well-founded hope; yea, we may have “a full assurance of hope,” that, “where he is, there we shall be also;” and that, “when He, who is our life, shall appear, we also shall appear with him in glory^l.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are deluding themselves with false hopes—

[There is not any one who does not conceive himself entitled to indulge a hope of happiness hereafter. But, to entertain any such hope without having received the Lord

^e Eph. iii. 17.^f John xvii. 21, 23.^g Gal. ii. 20.^h John xv. 5.ⁱ Gal. iv. 19, 20.^k Col. iii. 10, 11.^l Col. iii. 4.

Jesus Christ into our hearts by faith, is a fatal delusion. For the Apostle says, that they who are “without Christ” are also without hope^m. You will ask, Do I wish to drive you to despair? Yes, I do; so far, at least, as to drive you out of all false refuges, and to lead you to Him who is the only Saviour of the world: and I must declare unto you, that, whatever you lay as a foundation of hope, besides that which God himself has laid, you only deceive your own souls: for “other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christⁿ.” Christ is the only refuge of fallen man: nor can you have a scriptural hope of glory, till you have “fled to him, and laid hold on him^o,” and got his image enstamped upon your souls.]

2. Those who have a “good hope through grace”—

[“Let your union with Christ be more and more confirmed, becoming daily more intimate and more abiding. It is by this that the work of grace must be carried on, and perfected within you. It is by this that the justness of your hopes must be made to appear: for “every one that has a good hope in Christ will purify himself as Christ is pure,” and be progressively “changed into his image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” In proportion as this work advances, your hopes may well increase: and if this work decline within you, your evidences will be the less clear, and your hope be less assured. Press forward, then, for the highest possible conformity to the Saviour’s image; that you may already breathe, as it were, the atmosphere of heaven, and live in the constant anticipation of your future inheritance.]

^m Eph. ii. 12.

ⁿ 1 Cor. iii. 11.

^o Heb. vi. 18.

MMCLXXII.

PREACHING CHRIST.

Col. i. 28. *Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.*

THE mystery of the Gospel was first made known to Adam in Paradise: but in process of time the real scope of it was forgotten; and nothing of it remained but the rites whereby it was shadowed forth. To Abraham a plainer revelation of it was given; and to Moses, a complete system of types, which were to illustrate the Gospel in all its parts. Still, however,

the views which men had of it were obscure : the design of the ceremonial law itself was very imperfectly understood ; and the idea of all men being saved through the crucifixion of the incarnate Deity, was almost as new to the Jews, in the apostolic age, as to the heathens themselves. Hence St. Paul speaks of it as “ hid from all preceding ages and generations,” and as then for the first time “ manifested to the saints.” That the memory of it might continue to the end of time, and its benefits be universally diffused, our blessed Lord appointed an order of men, whose sole business should be to spread the knowledge of it throughout the world. Amongst these St. Paul was a very distinguished instrument. He both laboured more abundantly, and suffered more severely, than any other of the Apostles.

In our text we see,

I. The ministrations of this great Apostle—

He specifies distinctly, first of all, the *subject* of his ministrations—

[This, as he tells us in the words preceding our text, was Christ in us the hope of glory. The words might be translated, “ Christ *among*^a you the hope of glory.” But whether we change, or retain, the present translation, we are sure that the death of Christ, as an atonement for sin, was that which he chiefly insisted on. He expressly tells us so in another place^b, and declares that he had fully “ determined to know and preach nothing else^c.”

This he affirmed to be the only hope of sinful man : that it was that which made satisfaction to divine justice, and procured our reconciliation with his offended Father^d : that nothing could be added to it to render it more effectual^e : and that if ever we attained to happiness and glory, it must be entirely through the merit of his all-atoning sacrifice^f. But though the sufficiency of the death of Christ for our salvation was the principal subject of the Apostle’s preaching, yet the in-dwelling of Christ in the soul by his blessed Spirit was necessarily connected with it ; and the two points together formed the sum and substance of all his ministrations. He

^a *ἐν* is so translated, a few words before, “ *among* the Gentiles.”

^b 1 Cor. i. 23, 24.

^c 1 Cor. ii. 2.

^d ver. 21, 22.

^e Gal. v. 2, 4.

^f 1 Cor. iii. 11.

often speaks of Christ “dwelling in us^g,” and “living in us^h,” and “being our lifeⁱ,” and in the text he says, that “Christ *in* us is the hope of glory.”

The necessity of this he urged with as much care and earnestness as the atonement itself: because without Christ we could do nothing^k, yea, we must continue reprobates^l, and for ever destitute of any interest in his salvation^m.]

He next mentions the *manner* in which he conducted them—

[He left nothing undone which could promote the reception of the Gospel: he “warned every man:” he was faithful to the trust reposed in him; and, without either courting the favour of men or fearing their displeasure, he boldly commended himself to the consciences of all. Knowing the terrors of the Lord, he persuaded menⁿ. He told them freely of their lost estate, and their utter incapacity to help themselves. He set before them the provision which God had made for them in Christ Jesus; and in the most pointed terms assured them, that “if they neglected that great salvation, they could never escape” the wrath of God^o. If any, yea if even an angel from heaven should attempt to substitute another Gospel, or alter in any respect that which he had preached to them, he did not hesitate to pronounce them accursed^p. Nor had he any respect of persons. When preaching before kings, he spake so plainly as to make them tremble on their throne^q: and when addressing those who professed godliness, he warned them frequently with tears, that carnal and worldly-minded Christians, whatever they might profess, were “enemies of the cross of Christ; and that their end would be destruction^r.” He also “taught every man in all wisdom.” Being himself instructed beyond any of the sons of men, he laboured to impart what he had so freely received, and to make known to his hearers “the whole counsel of God.” Yet in this he exercised discretion. He administered milk to babes, and strong meat to those only who were able to digest it^s. As, on the one hand, he accommodated himself to the infirmities of the weak, so, on the other hand, he “withheld nothing that could be profitable” to the strong^t. As far as he could with a good conscience, “he became all things to all men, that by all means he might save some^u.”

^g Eph. iii. 17.

^h Gal. ii. 20.

ⁱ Col. iii. 4.

^k 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^l 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

^m Rom. viii. 9.

ⁿ 2 Cor. v. 11.

^o Heb. ii. 3. and 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

^p Gal. i. 8, 9.

^q Acts xxiv. 25.

^r Phil. iii. 18, 19.

^s 1 Cor. iii. 1, 2. Heb. v. 13, 14.

^t Acts xx. 20.

^u 1 Cor. ix. 19—22.

Hence it appears with how much justice he called himself “a wise master-builder^x :” indeed the whole of his ministrations prove him to have been “a workman that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth^y.”]

He further declares the *scope* or end at which he continually aimed—

[The Apostle considered himself to be nearly in the situation of Abraham’s servant, who was sent out to procure a wife for Isaac^z : and, like him he laboured to accomplish his mission in the best and most successful manner^a. He wished to present all, whether Jews or Gentiles, perfect in Christ Jesus.”

He wished to present them perfect in his righteousness. All who believe in Christ are freely justified from all their sins^b. They are clothed in the unspotted robe of Christ’s righteousness, and are “presented faultless before the presence of the Father’s glory^c.” Whatever iniquities may have been committed by them in their former life, they are all “blotted out as a morning cloud, and cast into the depths of the sea.” From the moment that they believe in Jesus, they are perfectly reconciled to God; they are “accepted in the Beloved^d,” and are “complete in him^e.”

He sought to present them also perfect through his grace. This was the end at which our blessed Lord aimed in dying for sinners^f : and the very same was the Apostle’s end in preaching to them. He would not have his converts to continue in a low state of holiness, but to attain the fullest conformity to the Divine image : he would have them to “be holy, even as He which had called them was holy^g.” This is the more usual acceptation of the term “perfect” in the sacred volume : it means that growth which Christians in general may be expected to attain : it imports maturity, in opposition to infantine weakness. And so anxious was the Apostle to bring his converts to this state, that he continued “travailing, as it were, in birth with them,” till it was fully accomplished : and this was the true reason of his so often “changing his voice” towards them^h in a way of consolation or reproof.]

From hence we see unquestionably,

II. The line which mutually becomes us in the relation in which we stand—

^x 1 Cor. iii. 10.

^y 2 Tim. ii. 15.

^z Gen. xxiv. 4.

^a 2 Cor. xi. 2.

^b Acts xiii. 39.

^c Jude, ver. 24.

^d Eph. i. 6.

^e Col. ii. 10. and Rev. iii. 18. middle clause.

^f ver. 22.

^g 1 Pet. i. 15, 16.

^h Gal. iv. 19, 20.

1. Me, as your minister—

[St. Paul is doubtless the best model for a Christian minister; and, consequently, *he* is most likely to labour with effect who follows him in *the subject, the manner, and the scope* of his ministrations. What then becomes *me* but to be a follower of him in these respects? God helping me, this is what I have endeavoured to be, and hope to continue even to the end. I must know nothing but Christ, and him crucified; I must warn or comfort men with all faithfulness; I must not relax my labours as long as I can have access to one who is not yet presented perfect in Christ Jesus; and I must regard the turning of many unto righteousness as the best and richest reward of all my labours — — —]

2. You, my stated hearers—

[The preaching of Christ is generally called enthusiasm: the warning of men respecting their guilt is deemed harshness: the labouring to instruct men is ascribed to an officious impertinence, or ostentatious vanity, or perhaps designing hypocrisy. A solicitude to bring men to a state of spiritual perfection is reckoned, I had almost said, among the most unpardonable of crimes; insomuch, that the drunkard, the whoremonger, and adulterer, shall meet with more favour from the world at large, than a faithful, diligent, conscientious minister. But if we revere the person and ministry of Paul, we ought also to honour those who resemble him; and to concur with them to the uttermost, by a submission to their rebukes, a following of their instructions, and an entire devoting of ourselves to the service and enjoyment of God. We should have the same end in hearing which they have in preaching to us; we should not be satisfied with any low attainment, but desire and labour to be “perfect in Christ Jesus.” This is what, through the tender mercy of my God, I have long experienced at your hands; and this is what I pray God I may ever see in you, as long as our mutual relation shall subsist, and till we be summoned to give an account of ourselves at the judgment-seat of Christ.

Let me however both “teach and warn” you. The time is shortly coming when I must present you all before God, either as having answered the end of my ministrations, and as having attained perfection in Christ, or as having disregarded and defeated all my efforts for your salvation. The Lord grant that I may not in that day prove “a swift witness against you,” but may have you as “my joy and crown of rejoicing” to all eternity.]

MMCLXXIII.

MYSTERY OF THE GOSPEL TO BE SEARCHED OUT.

Col. ii. 1, 2. *I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.*

NOTHING is more odious than a boasting spirit. Yet are there occasions on which it may be proper for a minister to declare to his people the greatness of his affection for them, and of his solicitude in their behalf. St. Paul, than whom no man was ever further from indulging this hateful spirit, judged it right, in almost all his epistles, to assure his converts of his remembrance of them night and day in prayer; and of his willingness to impart to them, not the Gospel only, but even his own soul, because they were dear to him^a. This tended to beget in them a reciprocal affection, and to open their ears to his instructions; and, at the same time to commend to them the Gospel, which had generated in his heart these feelings towards them. True it is, indeed, that he abounded in love far beyond any ministers of the present day: but still every faithful minister may, without pride or arrogance, adopt towards his people the language of our text, and say, "I would that ye knew what great conflict I have in my soul for you."

That we may enter fully into the Apostle's words, I will shew you,

I. What he desired in behalf of the Colossian Church—

His object was, "that he might present every man perfect in Christ Jesus^b." With this view, he sought,

^a 1 Thess. i. 2, 3. ii. 7, 8. and iii. 9, 10.

^b Col. i. 28.

1. To bring them to a clear knowledge of the Gospel of Christ—

[The Gospel is here called a mystery, even “the mystery of God:” and throughout all his writings he designates it as a great stupendous mystery. It is the mystery of God, *even* of the Father, and of Christ. It must be viewed as from all eternity concerted between the Father and the Son in the covenant of redemption; wherein the Father agreed to accept the mediation of his Son, in behalf of man; and the Son agreed to assume our nature, and to bear our sins, and to work out a righteousness for us by his own obedience unto death; and so to watch over those whom the Father gave him, that they might all, without exception, attain to everlasting life^c.

Now all this he would have them “understand;” and not in a mere superficial way, but with such “a full assurance” as should leave not a doubt upon their mind either of its truth or excellency. In it are “riches” that are utterly unsearchable: riches *of wisdom*, which no finite mind can comprehend: riches *of love*, which can never be explored: riches *of mercy*, which eternity will never suffice to celebrate. He would have them see how harmoniously all the divine perfections unite in this mystery, and how wonderfully they are glorified. In a word, he would have them see in it a salvation so worthy of God, and so suited to man, as to carry with it, independently of all other considerations, a satisfactory evidence of its divine origin, and a pledge of the happiness of all who embrace it.

Now this is precisely what every pious minister wishes, and labours to accomplish. Those who are themselves ignorant of this mystery will be satisfied with some loose general statement about Christ, if they do not leave him out altogether. But not so the man who is taught of God: he will endeavour to exhibit to his people all the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ^d: and he never will rest, till God has shined into their hearts, to give them a clear, a rich, an assured knowledge of it.]

2. To bring them to an open “acknowledgment” of it—

[“With the heart man believeth unto righteousness: but with the mouth confession is made unto salvation^e.” Whatever we may know of this mystery, it will be ineffectual for eternal happiness, if we do not confess Christ openly before men. He will never acknowledge those who are afraid to

^c John xvii. 2, 6, 9—12. with 22—24.

^d 2 Cor. iv. 6.

^e Rom. x. 10.

acknowledge him; but will surely “deny them in the presence of his Father and of his holy angels.” Hence St. Paul laboured to effect this also; even to impress their minds so deeply with this mystery, that they might rejoice and glory in it, and be willing to bear all the sufferings that could ever be inflicted on them for their adherence to it.

And for this we also would labour. Against a timid concealment of men’s convictions we would bear the most decided testimony. We know, indeed, that a confession of Christ before men will bring persecution with it. But if any man be unwilling to bear his cross after Christ, or even to lay down his life for his sake, we declare that he is not, nor can ever be, accepted of him. “If he love father or mother more than Christ, he cannot be Christ’s disciple:” “if he love his own life,” so as to save it here, “he shall assuredly lose it” to all eternity. Amongst those for whom a place is prepared in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, “the fearful and unbelieving” are no less numbered, than those who have been guilty of idolatry or murder^f. “If we would approve ourselves the servants of Christ, we must not only bear our cross after him, but rejoice that we are accounted worthy to suffer shame, or even death, for his sake.” “We must be faithful unto death, if ever we would obtain the crown of life.”]

3. To bring them to an union of heart with each other, by means of it—

[“Knowledge,” were it as great as that of angels, would be of no value, without love. Nor would zeal itself, even though it led us to endure the flames of martyrdom for Christ’s sake, be accepted of our God, if it were destitute of love. An union of heart amongst the disciples of our Lord is that by which, in a pre-eminent degree, they are to be distinguished. By love they are to be “knit together;” even as beams of timber, when joined and compacted by the builder of an edifice. In the whole universe, there exists no other bond like this. The ties of nature are feeble, when compared with it. It resembles, as far as any thing can resemble, the union that subsists between the Persons of the Godhead: and by it, more than by any thing else, is the power of religion displayed. “I pray for them,” says our Lord, “that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may know that thou hast sent me^g.” This, then, the Apostle sought: and this would we seek: nor would we ever be satisfied, till we see it attained and exercised amongst you.]

^f Rev. xxi. 8.

^g John xvii. 20, 21.

Having seen what the Apostle desired for them, we will proceed to shew,

II. Why with such intensity he desired it—

In the close of the preceding chapter he speaks of “labouring and *striving*” according to the working of the Holy Spirit, who wrought in him mightily. The word, before translated “striving,” he here repeats; conveying to us, thereby, the idea that he exerted himself, for the attainment of these things, with such a kind of “conflict” as wrestlers, racers, or fighters, maintained in the Grecian games. His whole heart and soul were engaged in behalf of all his Christian brethren, whether personally known to himself or not, that these great things might be accomplished in them. And for this end he laboured,

1. Because these things were essential to their comfort—

[In truth, there is no happiness in religion, unless it have its perfect work within us. A superficial and general view of the Gospel calls forth no admiring and adoring thoughts: nor does it gender in the soul those ardent affections which bind together the members of Christ’s mystical body, and make every one of them ready to “lay down his life for the brethren^h.” But when all the riches of the Gospel are opened to our view, and the incomprehensible mystery of redemption, in all its inscrutable provisions, in its execution at the appointed period, in the mode of its application to the soul, and in all its stupendous consequences, is unfolded to us, so that we can behold our own interest in it, and are enabled to bear witness to it before an ignorant and ungodly world—what is all this, but heaven already begun in the soul? The glorified saints around the throne have no higher sources of joy than these, no higher theme of praise: and they are only happier than we, because their discovery of these things is more complete, and they are freed from all those infirmities which, in our present state, interrupt our enjoyment of them. To this I may add: when the soul, by virtue of this mystery, is filled with love, even with such love as Christ himself bears to his saints, such love as is the very image of God within us—this is happiness: the man that lives in the exercise of this

^h 1 John iii. 16.

divine principle breathes a purer atmosphere than others; and can say, "This is the house of God, this is the gate of heaven."

Now the Apostle was anxious that "the hearts" of all his brethren "might be thus comforted." And what *more* can I wish for you? or rather I should say, what *less* than this should satisfy my desires in your behalf? Brethren, this is the state in which I would have you live: this is the comfort which I would have you all enjoy. And for this end it is, that from time to time I endeavour to unfold the mysteries of the Gospel, and to encourage amongst you that communion of saints which is a foretaste of heaven upon earth.]

2. Because, by nothing short of this could the full ends of his ministry be attained—

[A parent would not be satisfied if his children continued year after year in a state of infantine weakness: he would desire to see their stature increased, and their faculties enlarged. Thus the Apostle felt, in behalf of all his spiritual children. He longed that they might "grow up into Christ in all things, as their living Head;" daily increasing in the knowledge of God, daily brought into closer communion with him, daily assimilated more and more to his blessed image.

And this is what we would desire in your behalf. We are thankful when "your understandings are opened in any measure to understand the Scriptures;" and, from being blind, you are able to see, though it be only "men, as trees, walking." But we cannot be satisfied with this: no; we would "put our hands on your eyes again," till you should "be restored, so as to see every man clearlyⁱ." In truth, whether in respect of faith or love, we never would rest satisfied, till you have attained "the full measure of the stature of Christ." We would never cease to labour, till we have "perfected that which is lacking in your faith^k," and till we see you "standing perfect and complete in all the will of God^l."]

BEHOLD, then ^m,

1. What you should desire for yourselves—

["Who will shew us any good?" says the Psalmist: and then adds, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon usⁿ!" Truly, there is nothing in the universe worthy of

ⁱ Mark viii. 24, 25.

^k 1 Thess. iii. 10.

^l Col. iv. 12.

^m If this were a subject at an *Ordination* or a *Visitation*, it would be proper to insert here a distinct observation to this effect; — behold what course we ministers are bound to pursue — — —

ⁿ Ps. iv. 6.

a thought in comparison of this. What can worldly knowledge do for you, in comparison of the knowledge of Christ? or what can the fondest endearments of mere human affection do, in comparison of the love that is divine? If St. Paul's judgment may be taken, he "counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord." And this is the mind which I would wish to be in you. This, beloved, is your duty: this is your privilege. O! beg of God, that you may rise to this. Be not satisfied with low attainments, when such prospects are before you. You see what exertions men make for the attainment of knowledge, and the acquisition of honour: and will ye be less earnest in the pursuit of heavenly things? In a contest for earthly honours, you might feel discouraged by a consciousness of your inferiority in point of talent and capacity: but no such discouragement need be felt by any one in the conflict to which I call you. The very babe and suckling stands on a level with the wise and prudent; or rather, is raised above him, in proportion to his docility, and his willing submission to the truth of God. It is the *heart*, and not the *head*, that is the seat of divine knowledge, and the region of love. I pray you, brethren, let these things become the objects of your ambition, and never account any labour too great for the attainment of them.]

2. With what ardour you should seek after them—

[You have seen "what great conflict" your minister, if faithful, will have for you, in relation to these things: and will ye feel less for yourselves? Go, look at those who are engaged in the race, the wrestling, the combat; do you not see how they put forth their energies? Have they any disposition to look about them, or any time to relax their efforts? Yet is the object of their contest light in comparison of yours, and the consequence of a failure unworthy of a thought. Come, brethren, and be in earnest. Study the sacred volume: study it with much and fervent prayer: entreat of God to reveal his dear Son in your hearts: implore the Holy Spirit to "guide you into all truth:" and see to it, that you "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Thus will you have in yourselves an evidence of the Gospel, which no human learning can give you; and conviction of its excellency, which nothing but experience can impart.]

MMCLXXIV.

THE FULNESS THAT IS IN CHRIST.

Col. ii. 3. *In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

“WISDOM,” we are told, “is the principal thing; and therefore we should get wisdom.” In all civilized countries, wisdom has been held in the highest repute: and institutions have been set on foot for the cultivation of it. How highly it was esteemed amongst our ancestors, we may judge from the provision which they made for the education of youth in all succeeding ages. Not that the establishments in this seat of learning were intended merely to reward those who distinguished themselves by early attainments: they were designed to give them also an opportunity of bestowing an undivided attention to literature and science throughout the remainder of their days: and if they be not improved for this end, the fault is not in the institutions themselves, but in those who have been admitted into them. We can have seen but little of the world, if we have not noticed the superiority which a cultivated mind possesses over one that is rude and uninstructed. And though it must be granted, that human learning will not change and sanctify the heart, yet we assert, that it will give a very great advantage for the understanding and explaining of the Holy Scriptures.

We say not that God *could* not, or *did* not, make use of weak and unlettered men for the diffusion of his Gospel: but, as he selected Moses, a man “learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians,” for the instruction and government of the Jewish Church, so he selected Paul, who had “been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel,” to be his messenger of grace to the Gentile world: and, if he was pleased so to adapt the instrument to the work in that age of miracles, much more is such a qualification desirable for his chosen servants, now that miracles have ceased. We must

not however forget, that the Scriptures are the fountain of true wisdom. We should ever bear in mind, that the heathen sages, though wiser than their contemporaries, were deplorably ignorant in comparison of those who live under the Christian dispensation : and even the light which some of the most learned amongst them possessed, was most probably obtained, either immediately or remotely, from the inspired volume. There, and there alone, is true wisdom to be found ; and therein are contained “ all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

To open and unfold these to you, is an employment worthy of the occasion on which we are assembled^a.

St. Paul in my text is expressing his ardent desire in behalf of the Christians at Colosse, whom he had never seen, that they might be fully instructed in the great mystery of the Gospel of Christ, “ in *whom*, he observes, are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge ;” but, in the margin, the word mystery is considered as the antecedent ; and the translation is, “ *wherein* ;” i. e. “ in *which* mystery are contained all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge ;” and this we consider as the better rendering, though the sense will amount to nearly the same either way.

In illustration of these words we shall,

I. Open to you these treasures of wisdom and knowledge—

II. Commend them to your diligent pursuit—

I. We are to open to you these treasures of wisdom and knowledge—

But “ who is sufficient for such ” an undertaking ? Who can enter on such a task, without a fear, not only that he shall betray his own ignorance, and disappoint your expectations, but that he may even expose the Gospel itself to contempt ? Indeed, if I were capable of doing justice to my subject, such is

^a Preached as a *Commemoration Sermon* in King’s College Chapel, Cambridge.

the impatience of modern auditories, that I could not have time to do more than merely open to you the casket, and give you a superficial view of its contents : but feeling how incompetent I am to unfold all the hidden mysteries of the Gospel, I must entreat you to make up for my deficiencies by your candour ; and to be contented with treasuring up for your benefit what you do hear, when you cannot be gratified with all that you would wish to hear.

There are three points to which I will call your attention ; and which may give you some little idea, that the subject, however unworthily handled by me, is at least deserving of the deepest investigation. The points I refer to are at all events such as the most enlightened heathens had no idea of ; namely, *The real state of man—The eternal counsels of God concerning him—and the stupendous effects produced by those counsels.* Let these things be for a while considered by us.

The real state of man was altogether unknown to the heathen world. That he was a weak, guilty, and polluted creature, they knew ; but how weak, how guilty, how polluted, they had no conception ; much less did they know how he was brought into such a state. It is from the inspired volume alone that we learn the perfection of his original nature, and the loss of that perfection through the fall of his first parents. From thence alone do we learn that obvious truth, that we “cannot bring a clean thing out of an unclean.” Behold then, at the very onset, what a stupendous mystery is here ! that we died in Adam ! that “those who have never sinned after the similitude of his transgression,” are yet partakers both of his guilt and corruption ! that we are “born in iniquity, and conceived in sin,” and are “by nature children of wrath !”

To this I beg your particular attention, because it is the very foundation of all spiritual knowledge ; it is the very threshold, by stumbling at which, multitudes are kept from ever entering into the deep recesses of the Gospel. You cannot but know, that

men in general, and even learned divines, endeavour to soften down the Scripture declarations of man's guilt and misery : some deny that we are fallen at all ; and assert that we come into the world as pure as Adam did from his Creator's hands. Others allow that we are fallen, but deny that we are involved in the guilt of our first parents, or that the corruption which we inherit from them is any thing more than what we have an innate power to subdue. They think that the descriptions given of us in the inspired volume are not to be taken in a literal sense ; and that to say that we are "*dead* in trespasses and sins," is only a metaphor, importing that we are not quite so much alive to God and holiness as we ought to be.

And now mark how entirely such sentiments obstruct the way to true wisdom and knowledge : man being in so good a state, there was no occasion for the counsels of the Most High to suggest a method of deliverance from it : a way of deliverance was obvious enough : there was no necessity for God himself to become incarnate, and to expiate the sins of men by his own blood ; (man might be saved without any such sacrifice :) there was no need that the third person in the ever-blessed Trinity should undertake to dwell in the hearts of men, to enlighten their minds, to draw them unto Christ, to renew their nature, and to make them meet for heaven ; (man of himself, by the aid of his own reason and resolution, was sufficient for these things :) the obligations conferred upon us by this work of redemption are not such as to call for all the powers of our souls to be consecrated to God in the way of holy obedience ; (such a life is needless, enthusiastic, and absurd :) in a word, there is no great cause for alarm to any of us ; for we are all in the way to heaven ; and when we get there, shall have no great wonders to celebrate, but only to thank God for that which he could not justly or consistently have withheld. Yes, brethren, *this* it is which obstructs the entrance of light into the souls of men : *this* it is which makes every

one suppose that he understands the Gospel well enough: *this* it is that leads men to deride all idea of mystery, and to reduce the Gospel to a system of heathen ethics. *This view of our state by nature supercedes all occasion for the Gospel*; every part of which supposes man to be a *guilty, polluted, helpless* creature; so *guilty*, that he deserves the everlasting wrath of God; so *polluted*, that he must be made an entire new creature before he can have any enjoyment of God, either now or in the eternal world^b; and so weak, that he cannot of himself either do a good act, or think a good thought^c: and I do not hesitate to affirm, that the very first step towards true wisdom and knowledge is, to renounce all idea of our being “rich and increased in goods, and in need of nothing;” and to confess, from our inmost souls, that we are “wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.”

Next, let us contemplate *the counsels of the Most High respecting man*. From all eternity, God foresaw the state to which the human race would be reduced, and concerted with his only dear Son how to effect their recovery. The Father proposed to his Son to become our Surety and Substitute; to assume our nature; to bear our sins; to expiate our guilt; to fulfil the law which we had broken, and to satisfy the justice which we had offended; and thus to restore us to happiness, without dishonouring God as the Moral Governor of the universe. The Son accepts the proposal, and undertakes to accomplish the redemption of a ruined world^d: and the Holy Spirit also undertakes to impart to the souls of the redeemed all that the Lord Jesus should purchase for them^e. To these counsels the Apostle also constantly refers,

^b John iii. 3. ^c John xv. 5. 2 Cor. iii. 5. Phil. ii. 13.

^d Isai. xlix. 6. and liii. 4, 5, 10, 11.

^e See the account given us of this in Ps. xl. 6—8. “Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt-offering and sin-offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart.”

as the true source of our redemption: "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world, unto our glory^f:" and he declares that the manifestation of them to the world under the Christian dispensation was eminently committed to him, and was to be a source of knowledge, not to men only, but to the angels themselves: "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the *unsearchable riches* of Christ; and to make all men see, what is the fellowship of this mystery, which *from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God*, who created all things by Jesus Christ; to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God, *according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord*^g."

Behold then here what treasures of wisdom and knowledge are unfolded to us! We see the veil torn away from before our eyes, and the Sacred Three sitting, as it were, in council, to provide for man's recovery, myriads of ages before his fall: we behold the Father proposing to lay our iniquities on his only-begotten Son; his Son accepting the office of our Substitute; and the Holy Spirit engaging to render those mysterious plans effectual for the salvation of man! Can we see nothing wonderful in all this? Does not this "love surpass all knowledge," and all conception? Is there not in it "a length, and breadth, and depth, and height" that can never be explored? Yes; and hence St. Paul speaks of "riches of glory" as contained in this mystery^h; and, in reference even to a subordinate part of it only, exclaims, "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding outⁱ!"

Let us now pass on to *the effects of these counsels*, and see whether they also do not unfold the most stupendous mysteries.

^f 1 Cor. ii. 7.

^g Eph. iii. 8—11. See also Col. i. 26, 27.

^h Col. i. 27.

ⁱ Rom. xi. 33.

From these counsels results all *the work of Christ*. He in due time left the bosom of his Father, took our nature, was born of a pure virgin, fulfilled the law, offered himself a sacrifice for sin, rose from the dead, and ascended up to heaven to carry on and perfect the work which he began on earth. Think of all this as *necessary* for our salvation: think of it as *concerted from eternity*, and executed in time, and *at this very moment accomplishing* by means of his continual intercession at the right hand of God: Is there nothing wonderful in all this?

From these counsels also results *the salvation of man*. Not a human being to whom the Gospel comes is ever saved, but by virtue of this work which Christ wrought out for him: and by means of this the vilest of the human race are saved. Those who seek an interest in this Saviour are accepted of him, even though they may have committed sins of a scarlet or crimson die: but they “who, going about to establish their own righteousness, will not submit to the righteousness of God,” are rejected; and the very Saviour who would have been a sanctuary to them, becomes a rock of offence, over which they fall to their eternal ruin. Here is a plain way of salvation for all. In vain do men dispute about the efficacy of their own good works to save them: here is a door; and they who will enter in by it are saved; and those who obstinately stand without, perish. The very builders of the ark themselves perished, because they did not enter into it: and so will all who do not flee for refuge to this hope that is set before them. Is this wisdom, or this knowledge of small value?

Further, from these counsels results *the glory of God himself*. It is in this way alone that God is, or can be glorified, by any child of man. If man were saved in any other way, every one of the Divine perfections would be dishonoured. What evidence would there be that God is *holy*, if he suffered his laws to be violated with impunity? What would become of all the rights of *justice*, if no sacrifice were offered for

sin? How could the *truth* of God be preserved, if his threatenings were not executed, either against the sinner himself, or against one who should be substituted in his place? Men speak of God's mercy as if that was the only attribute to be displayed, and as if it was of no consequence whether his other attributes were honoured or not: but God will not suffer one of his attributes to be exalted at the expense of all the rest: and therefore has he opened for us a way of salvation whereby all might be displayed and all be glorified. Not only is mercy now exalted, but justice too; and *that*, not only in the condemnation, but in the salvation also of sinful man: nor is it a whit less glorified in the salvation of a penitent believer, than it is in the condemnation of the impenitent, and unbelieving. Is here then no mystery? are here no treasures of wisdom and knowledge? Verily the angels themselves are made wiser by the revelation of them to the Church; and they are justly represented as "desiring daily to look into them," in order that their admiration of God may be augmented, and their felicity increased.

We have been constrained to speak only summarily on these points; but enough has been said to shew, that in this subject there are treasures which will amply repay the most laborious investigation.

We proceed, therefore,

II. To commend these treasures to your most diligent pursuit—

Much as we revere human knowledge, we must declare, that, in comparison of that which we have been considering, the wisdom of philosophers is of no account: for this knowledge is at once the *most sublime*, the *most certain*, the *most attainable*, the *most useful*.

What is there so *sublime* as this? We grant that many human sciences, and astronomy in particular, are very sublime; and appear to be out of the reach of mortal man: but it is well known that philosophy, in many of its branches, was carried to as high, if

not a much higher pitch among the unenlightened heathen, than amongst ourselves. But who amongst the heathen could ever find out God? Who could ever dive into his counsels? Who could account for the actual state of things as they existed in the world? Who could tell how a sinful man might be accepted of his God? Truly, "the world by wisdom knew not God:" this knowledge was "too wonderful and excellent" for unassisted reason to explore: nor can we, even with the Bible in our hands, attain it, unless God by his Spirit open the eyes of our understanding, and shine into our hearts to give it us. We are expressly told, that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, the things which God hath prepared for us;" and the things there spoken of are those which are revealed to us in the Gospel. It is not of heaven that the Apostle speaks, but of the Gospel, and the mysteries contained in it. These are the things which are called in Scripture τὰ μεγαλεῖα τοῦ Θεοῦ, "the wonderful works of God^k." And they are "the things of the Spirit, which the natural man cannot receive, nor even know, because they are spiritually discerned." Well therefore may we covet knowledge which was "hid in God from the foundation of the world," which the wisest philosophers could never attain, which even the learned among ourselves cannot possess, unless God himself be their teacher, and "open their understandings to understand it."

In point of *certainty*, there is nothing that can be compared with it. There are indeed in it many things which we cannot comprehend: but there is much known, and known on the authority of God himself. Most other knowledge is involved in doubt and obscurity; insomuch that hypotheses which have been established for ages, have yet been overthrown by the penetration of a Copernicus or a Newton: but the truth of God is unchangeable; and whether viewed in the promise to Adam, or in subsequent

^k Acts ii. 11.

prophecies, or in the types and shadows of the law, or in the fuller revelation of the Gospel, is ever the same; nor can all the subtilty of men or devils invalidate so much as one single point. Indeed, though received on the credit of the inspired writers, it so commends itself to the believer, as to approve to him its divine origin, as soon as ever it is received into his heart: he there finds a counterpart of every truth he has received, and “hath the witness in himself” that it is indeed from God. Now one great discouragement in the pursuit of human knowledge is, that after having laboured for many years, we know not but that we may, after all, be found wrong, in things which we deemed of considerable moment. But here, we never need to fear a disappointment: God’s word, like himself, abideth for ever; nor shall one jot or tittle of it ever fail.

Nor is there any other so *attainable*. Thousands have not ability to investigate the depths of human science: if they should bestow ever so much labour, for ever so long a time, it would be in vain. But not so the knowledge of the Gospel: for though it is so deep, that no man by the efforts of unassisted reason can enter into it, yet it is so easy of acquisition, that “he who runs may read and understand it.” If God “open our eyes, we shall see wondrous things out of his law:” if he shine into our hearts, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God shall be seen by us. The qualification for this knowledge consists, not so much in the head, as in the heart: “God opened the *heart* of Lydia to attend to the things that were spoken by Paul.” Here then every one is encouraged to pursue it: for “none teacheth like God:” he can “ordain strength in the mouth of babes and sucklings.” I grant indeed that it is a “hidden knowledge;” it is “a treasure hid” in a field. But it is revealed *to* us in the word, and shall be revealed *in* us by the Spirit, if we desire to be taught of him. The promise is, “All thy children shall be taught of God:” and, if only we obtain his teaching, we shall “be guided into all truth;” nor

shall "a way-faring man, though a fool, be left to err therein."

Lastly, What can be compared with it in point of *utility*? We deny not but that knowledge of various kinds is replete with benefit to man: but *that* benefit is bounded by this world, and the present state of things. Not so the knowledge of which we are speaking: that extends to the eternal world: in the knowledge of God and of Christ, are all our hopes centered. By this we are *justified*: as it is said, "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many." By it also we are *sanctified*: as it is said, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." By it also we shall be *exalted to glory*; for it is said, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." What is there then that can be compared with this? Will earthly knowledge save you? If you could travel the whole round of science, and grasp in your mind all that ever was comprehended by human intellect, would it pacify a guilty conscience? Would it take away the sting of death? Would it enable you to look forward with comfort to the eternal world? Would it prepare you to stand at the judgment-seat of Christ, and to give up your account with joy? No; nothing can do this but the knowledge of God as reconciled to us in the Son of his love: this is the sole property of the Gospel, even of that Gospel which is so neglected and despised. If then you would view these things aright, you must study the Gospel, and "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus your Lord."

Must we then lay aside our earthly knowledge? you will ask. No; but you must get it sanctified by the Spirit of God. The spoils of the Midianites were consecrated to the Lord; but before they were suffered to be brought into his tabernacle, "every thing that would abide the fire, must pass through the fire; and whatsoever would not abide the fire, must be made to go through the water:" for then only could

they be an acceptable offering to him, when they were cleansed and purified from their corruption¹. Thus also must your learning be sanctified : it must not be set in competition with the word of God, but be made subservient to it. Beware then lest it blind your eyes, and fill you with a conceit that you do not need to be taught of God : for what the Apostle says is alike applicable to the philosopher and the peasant, “ If any man will be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise.” We must have the docility of “ little children, if we would enter into the kingdom of heaven ;” and if we will not humble ourselves in that manner, God has told us, that “ he will take the wise in their own craftiness.” In subserviency to the Gospel, your learning will be an invaluable blessing : but in opposition to it, it will prove a curse ; for God will “ confound the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.”

Are we then desirous of attaining these heavenly treasures ? Let us seek after them in the Holy Scriptures : and whilst we seek for knowledge as silver, and “ search for it as for hid treasures, let us cry to God for it, and lift up our voice to him ; since it is the Lord alone that giveth wisdom, and out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding^m.” Let us beg of God to “ give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him ; that the eyes of our understanding being enlightened, we may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from from the deadⁿ.” In this way we may hope to “ acquaint ourselves with God,” and to attain the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.” Then we may hope also to “ shine as lights in a dark world,” and “ be as cities set upon

¹ Numb. xxxi. 23, 54. ^m Prov. ii. 1—6. ⁿ Eph. i. 16—20.

a hill." Or, if our sphere be circumscribed within narrower limits, we shall at least have this benefit, that we are "made wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus."

MMCLXXV.

THE CHARACTER OF CHRISTIANS.

Col. ii. 6, 7. *As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him; rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.*

THE greatest joy of a faithful minister is to see his people flourish. The Apostles were eminent examples to us in this respect^a. St. Paul was as solicitous for the welfare of those whom he had only heard of by report, as for those who had been converted by his ministry^b. Hence he took occasion from what they had attained to urge them on to increasing watchfulness and assiduity. Mark here,

I. The Christian's character—

Christ is the gift of God to man^c. That gift the Christian has received—

[He has felt his need of it; he has implored of God to bestow it on him, and has received it for all the ends and purposes for which it has been conferred on sinful man — — — He has received Christ in all his offices, as "Christ Jesus, the Lord."]

He is the only person in the universe that has received it—

[Others regard it not: yea, they rather refuse it, and pour contempt upon it. They would rather earn salvation by some efforts of their own, than stand indebted for it to the free gift of God in Christ Jesus — — — But the Christian values nothing in comparison of it; and, in obtaining it, considers himself richer, than if the whole world were conferred

^a St. Paul was no less comforted with the piety of some, 2 Cor. vii. 4. than he was grieved with the want of it in others, Rom. ix. 2. Gal. iv. 19. See also 3 John, ver. 4.

^b ver. 1, 5.

^c John iv. 10.

upon him — — — Let him only be able to say, "My Beloved is mine, and I am his," and he desires no more. In possessing Christ, he possesses all things^d."]

In connexion however with this gift we must notice,

II. His duty—

Privilege and duty are inseparable. Though we receive all from God as a free gift, we yet have duties to perform. If we have received Christ, we must "walk in him:"

1. In dependence on him—

["In Christ is every thing treasured up for us:" and "we must receive every thing out of his fulness." There must be no dependence whatever upon ourselves, but an entire reliance "on him for wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Our whole life must be one continued act of "faith in the Son of God, who loved us, and gave himself for us^e."]

2. In conformity to him—

[As he is to us a source of all spiritual blessings, so is he unto us an example to which we must be conformed. His zeal for God must be transfused into our souls, and his love to man be copied in the whole of our intercourse with mankind^f. If we profess to "abide in him, we must walk in all things as he walked^g."]

But this duty is, in fact,

III. His privilege—

The diversity of metaphors in this passage greatly enriches the subject, without at all distracting our minds. Our duty and our privilege are to walk in Christ,

1. Firmly—

[The use of a root is, not only to convey nourishment to the branches, but to keep the tree steadfast amidst all the storms and tempests by which it may be assailed. And we, so far from being cast down by all the storms that may assault us, must take occasion from them to shoot our roots more deeply into this divine soil, and to take more firm hold of him by whom alone we can be upheld.]

2. Progressively—

^d 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.

^f John iv. 34. 1 John iii. 16.

^e Gal. ii. 20.

^g 1 John ii. 6

[The idea of walking necessarily imports progress, as does that of building also. Now, no man is content with laying a foundation: he will go on to build upon it a superstructure, till at last he has completed the edifice. Thus must we also do when we receive Christ into our souls: we must build upon him all our hopes, and never cease to increase in love to him, till we have attained that complete form and size, which the all-gracious Architect has ordained^h.]

3. Triumphantly—

[Grounds for sorrow we shall have, no doubt, whilst this great work is carrying forward; but we shall have abundant cause also for praise and thanksgiving. Be it so; our trials are great both from within and from without. But can we reflect on the gift bestowed upon us, and not be thankful? or can we contemplate the blessings attached to that gift, and not be thankful? I say then, that “thanksgiving and the voice of melody” should be heard from us, every step we take, from the beginning of our course even to the endⁱ.]

APPLICATION—

To you, even to every one amongst you, is offered this inestimable gift—

[They who have received this gift were once as destitute and unworthy as any of you: and there is not any one amongst you, however destitute and unworthy, but may be enriched with it, if only you cry unto your God, and seek the Saviour with your whole hearts^k — — —]

If you possess it, see that you labour to walk worthy of it—

[Never imagine that privilege either is, or can be, unconnected with duty. Nor ever imagine your course of duty closed, till you shall have attained the full measure of that piety, which your union with Christ was ordained to convey.]

^h Eph. ii. 20—22.

ⁱ Isai. li. 3.

^k Isai. lv. 1—3.

MMCLXXVI.

PROPER DEITY OF CHRIST.

Col. ii. 9. *In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.*

THE Church of Christ in the first ages was composed of Jews and Gentiles. Now, the Jews were at all times fond of their own superstitions, as the Gentiles were of the dogmas of philosophy: and the two,

meeting together upon one common ground, were ready to incorporate their respective peculiarities with the Gospel of Christ. To what extent this has been done in the Church of Rome, is well known. In truth, the whole system of the Catholics is little better than a mixture of heathen rites with Jewish superstitions. And those corruptions, which have prevailed to such an awful extent in the Church of Rome, began at a very early period to make their way into the house of God. Symptoms of an alarming nature had already appeared in the different Churches of Asia: and against them the Apostle put the Colossian converts on their guard; reminding them, that, whatever they might hope to add to Christ and his Gospel, their efforts would be in vain; since “in Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily;” and, consequently, without any addition from the conceits of philosophy, or the traditions of Judaism, he was amply sufficient for the work assigned him, and was “able to save to the uttermost all that should come unto God by him.”

From this assertion of the Apostle, I shall take occasion to set before you,

I. The doctrine of the Divinity of Christ—

It will be proper to consider it,

1. As expressed in the text itself—

[There are some texts, which, to a superficial observer, bear somewhat of a similar aspect with that before us. For instance, it is said in this very epistle, “It hath pleased the Father, that in Christ should all fulness dwell^a.” And, “Out of his fulness we are said to receive even grace for grace^b.” There is yet a stronger expression in the Epistle to the Ephesians, wherein we are exhorted to contemplate the love of Christ, till we are “filled with all the fulness of God^c :” nay, more: we are said ourselves to be “the fulness of Him who filleth all in all^d.” From such Scriptures as these it is argued by many, that the fulness spoken of in my text is only a fulness of gifts committed to Christ for the use of his Church; and that we may as well assume to ourselves the character of

^a Col. i. 19.

^b John i. 16.

^c Eph. iii. 18, 19.

^d Eph. i. 23.

the Godhead, as give it to him; since we, no less than he, are said to be “filled with all the fulness of God.” But, on a closer inspection, there will be found a wide difference between all the foregoing passages and our text. The fulness spoken of in the text is the fulness of “the Godhead;” residing in Christ, not symbolically, and for a season, as the Shechinah did in the tabernacle, but corporeally, substantially, permanently. There is no doubt a reference here to the Shechinah, which was a shadowy representation of the Deity. But the reference is rather in a way of contrast than of comparison: for, in my text, it is not *God* who is spoken of, and who is frequently said to dwell in his people, but the *Godhead*. Nor is Christ said to “*be filled*” with it, but to have it *essentially dwelling* in him; and *this*, not in a type or shadow, but really, vitally, necessarily, immutably: “In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.”

Suppose, now, the Lord Jesus Christ to be truly and unquestionably *God*: suppose, too, it is God’s purpose to make this known to us: then, I would ask, can we conceive of any words that would more clearly convey that truth than the language of my text? I must say, that if the words of my text do not clearly and decidedly declare the Godhead of Christ, no words whatever can express it. Nay, more; if Christ be not truly and properly God, the Apostle has done more, by his unguarded expressions, to lead us to idolatry, than all the most impious sophists in the universe could have done by their most ingenious arguments.]

2. As confirmed by other passages of Holy Writ—

[To enter fully into this subject, would embrace too large a field for one discourse. I shall therefore confine myself to a few passages only, which establish the Divinity of Christ in connexion with his humanity. And here let me call to your remembrance that prophecy of Isaiah, where it is said, “To us a child is born; to us a son is given: and his name shall be called, The Mighty God^e.” This is quite decisive upon the point. Again, in another part of the same prophecy, it is said, “A Virgin shall conceive, and bring forth a son; and they shall call his name Emmanuel^f,” which St. Matthew informs us, is “God with us^g.” In the New Testament, St. John, who seems to have been peculiarly attentive to this point, and, more than all the other inspired writers, anxious to impress it on our minds, says expressly, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and *the Word was God*. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us^h.” St. Paul also, to the same effect, says, “Great is the

^e Isai. ix. 6. ^f Isai. vii. 14. ^g Matt. i. 23. ^h John i. 14.

mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the fleshⁱ." What shall I say more? It is clear, that it was "God, who purchased the Church with his own blood^k:" and that He who wrought out for us a righteousness wherein we are to be accepted before God, is Jehovah himself^l. Know ye then, assuredly, that the glorious Person spoken of in my text was no other than our incarnate God, even "God over all, blessed for evermore^m."]

The peculiar caution given by the Apostle, in relation to this doctrine, leads me to shew you,

II. The importance of it to the welfare of our souls—

"Beware," says the Apostle, "lest any man spoil or rob you, through philosophy and vain deceit." So will I say to you: "Beware, lest any deceiver rob you of your hope founded on the divinity of your Lord and Saviour:" for,

1. On that depends the efficacy of his atonement—

[Supposing the Lord Jesus Christ to have been a creature, how could he make atonement for sin, or work out a righteousness that should be imputable to us? He could do no more than what, by the law of his creation, he was bound to do; and, after having done it, he would have been only "an unprofitable servant." Supposing him to be capable of meriting any thing, he could have merited only for himself. If it be said, that the Divine appointment was sufficient to make his sufferings available for us also, I answer, that, according to that argument, the same value might as easily have been stamped on the sacrifices of the Mosaic law, if God had seen fit to do so. But the Apostle has said, that "it is not possible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take away sins." And why not possible? If a Divine appointment were to stamp on one sacrifice a value which it possessed not, it might as well do so on another. But, if the impossibility arise from the inefficacy of a *creature's* blood, then it must attach to one creature as well as to another. For how remote soever two creatures may be asunder, their distance is but finite: whereas, to take away sin, the value of a sacrifice must be infinite: it must satisfy the demands of infinite justice, and entail upon the sinner all the blessings of infinite love and unbounded mercy. The divinity of our blessed Lord renders all this practicable to him. And it is this consideration which

ⁱ 1 Tim. iii. 16.

^l Jer. xxiii. 6.

^k Acts xx. 28.

^m Rom. ix. 5.

emboldens us to deliver our message to sinful men. We believe "that *God was in Christ*, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them:" and therefore, "as ambassadors from God, we beseech men, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to Godⁿ."]

2. From that arises his ability to supply our every want—

[To Him is committed the entire government of his Church^o. But if He be not God, we shall be in a state little better than the worshippers of Baal. It may be, that he is occupied about the concerns of some other person at the opposite side of the globe; and I must wait till he can hear me, and come to me, and help me: but, whilst he is delaying, I may perish. If he be a mere creature, he cannot be omnipresent, nor omniscient, nor omnipotent. These are the perfections, the incommunicable perfections, of Deity: and if he be not God, he does not possess them: and, if he possess them not, he cannot be sufficient for my wants. But he does possess them. He knows every want and every desire of my soul. "Unto Him all things, both in heaven and earth, are naked and opened:" and there can be no possible situation wherein "his grace shall not be sufficient for me^p." "He is the true God; and therefore he is, and shall be, to me eternal life."]

3. It is that which will give the chief zest to all our blessedness for evermore—

[If my sins were pardoned, though by a mere act of sovereign mercy, I should be happy any where. But when in heaven I contemplate every thing as the fruit of redeeming love, as procured for me through the blood and righteousness of my *incarnate God*; with what wonder must I be filled! I see now, why all the glorified saints fall upon their faces before God. They have reason to do so: they would be unworthy of a place in heaven, if they did not. How can they sing, "To Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood;" and remember, that He who so loved them was "King of kings and Lord of lords;" how can they sing thus, I say, and not be lost in wonder and amazement? And what are those hosannas which I hear offered to "God and to the Lamb?" What! is a creature joined in one common song of praise with the Creator? and that in heaven, too, in the very presence of the Deity? No; the Lamb is no other than our

ⁿ 2 Cor. v. 19, 20.

^o Eph. i. 22.

^p 1 John v. 20.

incarnate God, "the first and the last, who lived, and was dead, and is alive for evermore^a."

CONCLUSION—

1. Let this doctrine, then, be deeply fixed in your minds—

[Hold it not slightly and superficially; but acquaint yourselves with it, and with the irrefragable proofs whereby it is established. Those who are adverse to it, will bring forward passages which speak of him as inferior to the Father. But we must remember, that the Lord Jesus Christ is spoken of under different characters in Scripture, as God, as man, and as Mediator between God and man. As God, he is altogether, in the highest sense, "one with the Father^r." In the two latter characters he was inferior to the Father; and must, of course, be spoken of in that light. But these passages no more disprove his *divinity*, than the passages which speak of him as God disprove his humanity. Man himself is mortal, and immortal; mortal in his body, and immortal in his soul. Who ever thought of putting these in opposition to each other, and of making an affirmation of the one to be a denial of the other? Yet this is what is done by those who deny the divinity of our Lord. But be on your guard against them: and let neither men nor devils rob you of a truth so essential to your happiness both in time and in eternity.]

2. Let it make a suitable impression on your hearts—

[So astonishing is this truth, that it is a wonder we can ever think of any thing else. O, what prostration of soul is it calculated to produce! What admiring and adoring thoughts of God! What a zeal in his service! What a contempt of every thing that can come into competition with him! What boasting of him to our fellow-creatures! What commending of him to all! Verily, if we lived under a suitable impression of this truth, we should, as far as human infirmity would admit of it, resemble the very hosts around the throne. Let us, then, aspire after this experience. Let admiration, and love, and gratitude, and thanksgiving, occupy, as it were, our whole lives. And let us be looking forward to that blissful period, when we shall see him as we are seen; and "know him, even as we are known."]

^a Rev. i. 17, 18.

^r John x. 30.

MMCLXXVII.

THE CHRISTIAN'S COMPLETENESS IN CHRIST.

Col. ii. 10—12. *Ye are complete in him, which is the Head of all principality and power : in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ : buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.*

MAN is prone to corrupt whatever proceeds from God. He himself came pure out of his Maker's hands : but he soon corrupted his way ; as it is said, " God made man upright ; but they have sought out many inventions^a." As man has effaced the law originally written upon his heart, so has he, by imaginations of his own, obscured the revelation which God has given to the world. The Mosaic code was perverted by the Jews : the Christian code has been no less perverted by those who have called themselves Christians. Even in the apostolic age, and whilst the Apostles were yet in the full exercise of their ministry, persons arose to mutilate and destroy the faith of Christ. The very professors of Christianity, instead of receiving implicitly the truth as it was revealed, introduced into it their own corrupt notions : the heathen converts retaining their predilection for their former idolatry ; and Jewish converts striving to encumber it with their former superstitions. It is against such persons that St. Paul is cautioning the Colossian Church : " Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ^b. The heathen philosophers having multiplied their deities, and assigned to them a variety of ranks and offices, those who had been converted from amongst them still felt inclined to look to subordinate deities as their mediators and protectors : whilst others from among the Jews, who

^a Eccl. vii. 29.^b ver. 8.

had, or pretended to have, a great veneration for Moses, could not part with the traditions which they had received from their fathers, and which they supposed to be highly conducive to their spiritual benefit. But St. Paul tells both the one and the other, that they needed no help from the creature, since “in Christ dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead;” and no created power could do any thing for them, any farther than he was expressly commissioned by Christ to do it: in a word, that “they were complete in Christ;” and all attempts to add any thing to him, would retard, rather than advance, their conformity to his will, and would ultimately deprive them of all the benefits which they were thus erroneously labouring to secure.

This being the scope of the whole passage, we will draw your attention to the two things mentioned in our text; namely

I. The Christian’s completeness in Christ—

In Christ we have all that we can possibly need or desire—

[As God, he has “all the fulness of the Godhead dwelling in him bodily;” and consequently is an almighty and all-sufficient Saviour. But as man also, he has, by virtue of his mediatorial office, a fulness committed to him for the supply of his believing people; according as it is said, “It hath pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell^c.” In our corporeal frame there is, if I may so say, a fulness imparted to the head for the use of all the members, *that* being the chief depository of all the senses: so there is in Christ, for the use of all his members: all that we need is treasured up in him: and he of God is made unto us “wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption^d” — — —]

Nor can the creature add any thing to us—

[What, I would ask, can “philosophy, with all its vain deceits,” add to us? Can it suggest one single truth which is not contained in the Holy Scriptures, or give us one atom of spiritual discernment? — — — Can it devise any other way for a sinner’s justification before God, besides that which the Scripture reveals, through the blood and righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ? — — — Can it add any thing to the

^c Col. i. 19.

^d 1 Cor. i. 30.

operations of the Holy Spirit for the transformation of our souls into the Divine image? — — — Can it further, in any one respect, the everlasting redemption of our souls, so that we shall say, this is the work of philosophy, and not of Christ? — — — If the *maxims* of philosophy cannot effect any thing, can its *deities*? Can they help us, either by their personal efficiency, or by their mediation with any other? I ask further, can Jewish rites, whether those that have been devised by man, or those which were originally ordained of God, add to us in any of these respects! No; we confidently say, that the Christian is “complete in Christ:” he has in Christ all that he can stand in need of; and to confide in any other is to rob him of his glory, and fatally to deceive our own souls.]

But besides the Christian's completeness in Christ, we are called to notice,

II. His conformity to Christ—

That Christ is *an example* to us, is what every Christian well knows. But there is a distinction which is not generally adverted to, which yet it is of importance to remark; namely, that as he is an *example* to us in his *life*, so is he also, if we may so express it, an *exemplar* or *pattern* to us in his *work*. We will explain our meaning.

Christ having undertaken to redeem our souls, submitted to all that was necessary for that end: he *was circumcised*, as being made under the law for us: he *died* under the curse of that law; and after having been *buried* in the grave, he *rose again* for our justification before God. Now all this which was done *in him corporeally*, is to be done *in us spiritually*: the one was intended to be a *pattern* of the other. This is very minutely set forth by the Apostle Paul, who tells us that the power exercised towards us who believe, exactly accords with that which was exercised towards our Lord Jesus Christ in all the fore-mentioned particulars: his quickening from the dead, his rising from the grave, his ascension to heaven, and his session at the right hand of God far above all the principalities and powers of heaven or hell, have all a counterpart in us, wrought by the same divine Agent^e.

^e Compare attentively Eph. i. 19—22. and ii. 4—6.

Consider distinctly wherein this conformity consists—

[Was he circumcised? We have the true circumcision of the heart; that “which is made without hands, and which consists in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh:” and this we have by virtue of our own union with Christ, *in whom* we have experienced this *mystically*, and *through whom* we derive it *spiritually*. Was he *buried*? We also, in our baptism, were, as it were, buried with him; and coming up also from the water, (for here immersion seems to be referred to, as sprinkling evidently is in other places, the mode being not determinate to either, but left optional according to circumstances,) we are risen with him to a new and heavenly life. That this is the true import of the passage is beyond all doubt; as any one will see by comparing what the same writer has stated in his Epistle to the Romans^f — — — Here, I say, the parallel between what was *corporeally* wrought *in Christ*, and *spiritually* to be wrought *in his members*, is clear and manifest: we, “by faith in that power which raised him from the dead,” experience a similar resurrection to newness of life — — —]

In reference to this then, as well as to the former, we ask,

What can philosophy add to us?

[Has philosophy any principles whereby we can be stimulated more entirely to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, than we are led by the Gospel of Christ; or can it impart to us any strength beyond that which we derive from Christ? Did it ever operate thus in any instance from the foundation of the world? No; it never did, nor ever can. We further ask, Is there any such virtue in Judaizing principles, that we should have recourse to any of them for aid? No; we are expressly told, that by seeking aid from philosophical conceits or Jewish superstitions we shall not only not add to our safety, but shall actually be “beguiled and robbed of our ultimate reward^g.” It is to Christ alone that we must look, and from Christ we must receive all that is necessary for the carrying on and perfecting of our everlasting salvation.]

To IMPROVE this subject, we say to all,

1. Be thankful to God that your lot is cast where the Gospel is plainly and faithfully dispensed—

[The corruptions which began in the apostolic age have since been carried to such an extent as altogether to subvert

^f Rom. vi. 3—11.

^g ver. 18.

the Gospel of Christ. If I be asked before God, what popery is; I am constrained to answer, that, whatever it be *in theory*, it is *in practice* little better than a compound of Pagan idolatry and Jewish superstition. For want of seeing it before our eyes, we are apt to conceive of it as differing but little from the religion we profess: but it is in all its masses, penances, indulgences, such a system of delusion and impiety as makes one's very blood run cold. It is inconceivable how such a system of tyranny and imposture should have ever gained footing in the world. Little do the Protestants of the present day reflect on the obligations which they owe to their forefathers, and on the responsibility attaching to them for the advantages they enjoy. But could your eyes see in what darkness and bondage those who are of the Roman Catholic persuasion are held, you would never cease to bless God, that you have been born in a Protestant land, and been brought up members of a Church that is alike free from the errors of fanaticism, and the bonds of superstition. I know indeed that even in our Protestant Church there is still, in some places, as there was even in the apostolic age, a leaven of these deadly evils: but we speak to those who have learned to seek a completeness in Christ and a conformity to Christ, as the unalienable privilege, not of themselves only, but of every true believer.]

2. Beware of that false humility which would lead you to intrench upon the sufficiency of Christ—

[It was a false humility that led those in the apostolic age to seek other mediators or protectors besides Christ, and other means of obtaining his blessings than by faith alone. But whilst they assumed this "voluntary humility," they in reality were "vainly puffed up with a fleshly mind^h." So it is with those in the present day, who look for something to recommend them to Christ, whilst they should be receiving all out of his fulness as a free unmerited gift. Their principle is precisely that of which the Apostle complained in the Colossian Church. They think it would be presumption in them to go directly to Christ, and to expect to be admitted by him with such a load of guilt and corruption as they feel: and therefore they hope to make themselves better before they go, that so they may find a readier acceptance with him. But this is to dishonour Christ, and to take from him both the sovereignty, and the riches, of his grace. We must never forget the terms on which alone we are to obtain the blessings of his salvation: we are to buy them, it is true; but we are to "buy them all without money and without price" — — —]

^h ver. 18.

3. Live simply by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—

[It is “through faith in the Divine power” that all our completeness in Christ, or conformity to Christ, is to be obtained; and to exercise that faith, we are encouraged by the recollection of what that power has effected “in raising Christ from the deadⁱ.” Take a view then of the Lord Jesus after his crucifixion: see him dead, and buried, and guarded by a host of enemies who were determined in a few hours to prove him an impostor. Is he beyond the reach of Divine power? No; at the appointed moment he rises, and ascends to heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God, far above all the principalities and powers of earth and hell. Are you then in a more desperate state than he? or is not the power of God alike able to effect this change for you? Yea, is it not as much pledged for you as it was for him? Fear not then, “nor stagger at the promises of God through unbelief;” but as Abraham before you was, “be strong in faith, giving glory to God.”]

ⁱ The text.

MMCLXXVIII.

TRIUMPHS OF THE CROSS.

Col. ii. 13—15. *And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.*

THERE is one great mystery spoken of throughout the Scriptures, connected indeed with innumerable other truths, but itself the centre and substance of them all: this mystery is Christ crucified. St. Paul in particular insists upon it in all his epistles; he declares that it was the one only thing which he deemed necessary for him to preach, or for his people to be acquainted with. He takes every occasion of magnifying its importance, and of urging his converts to maintain the strictest regard to it. This appears remarkably in the preceding context^a; wherein

^a See Col. i. 27, 28. and ii. 1—4, 6, 7.

not only the mystery itself is stated, but the rich benefits arising from it are largely recited. Having in general terms said, "We are complete in Christ," he enters more minutely into the subject, and declares that we have communion with him in the whole of his humiliation and exaltation, being "circumcised in him, and buried with him, and risen with him," and, in short, partakers of all his victories and triumphs.

In the text, three benefits are enumerated as conferred by him upon his believing people, and which we propose for our present consideration. If we were to adhere strictly to the order of time in which these benefits were procured for us and imparted to us, we must take the latter clauses of the text first: but, as this is not necessary, we shall rather notice them as they stand; and observe,

I. He has "quickened us when dead"—

The state of the Gentile world fitly represents the state of every unregenerate man—

[We are dead before God, and doomed to everlasting death, on account of our sins^b — — — We are also under the habitual influence of the most corrupt desires, the mortifying of which was signified by the rite of circumcision, and the indulgence of which characterizes those who are uncircumcised in heart^c — — — We have no spiritual life whatever; nor are we even conscious of our own guilt and corruption; so justly may we be said to be altogether "*dead* in our sins."]

But God has quickened us with, and by, his Son—

[There is a *federal relation* subsisting between Christ and his people; so that when he was circumcised, they were circumcised; when he died, they died; when he rose, they rose. In all that he did and suffered, he was their representative, and they had communion with him as members with their head.

But besides this, they have a *vital union* with him, so as actually to receive life and vigour from him, whereby they rise to newness of life^d — — — In this restoration to life they are conformed to his likeness; they come forth from the grave of sin and corruption, and soar in their affections to the highest heavens, where from thenceforth their conversation is, and where they shall have their everlasting abode.]

^b Gal. iii. 10.

^c Tit. iii. 3. Eph. ii. 3.

^d Gal. ii. 20.

In addition to this benefit,

II. He has cancelled our obligation to punishment—

This he has done in reference to,

1. Past sins—

[The trespasses which we commit in our unregenerate state are as numerous as the sands upon the sea shore : yet, on our believing in Christ, they are all forgiven. Whether they have been more or less heinous, they are all pardoned. This is not spoken of as a blessing that shall be enjoyed in the eternal world, but as actually possessed at this time. God has “ cast our sins behind him into the very depths of the sea^e ” — — —]

2. Present infirmities—

[We must not be understood to say that believers have obtained a licence to commit sin with impunity ; for nothing can be more contrary to truth : *this* would make “ Christ himself a minister of sin.” But our meaning is this : the moral law denounces a curse against every one that transgresses it even in the smallest point. The ceremonial law illustrates and confirms those penal sanctions. The very sacrifices which were the appointed means of expiating sin, declared that the offerer deserved to die, and that he could not be saved but by the sufferings and death of an innocent victim. From hence it appears, that “ the hand-writing of ordinances,” which, in its external obligation, related only to the Jews, did, in its spiritual and more enlarged sense, declare the state of all mankind, whether Jews or Gentiles : and in this view it was equally “ against *us*, and contrary to *us*.”

Now this hand-writing Christ has “ blotted out,” and, by “ nailing it to his cross,” has “ taken it out of the way.” There were different ways of cancelling a bond : sometimes it was blotted out ; and sometimes it was pierced with a nail, and rendered thereby of no effect. Both these ways, if we may so speak, has Christ adopted, that we might have the fullest security that we shall never be dealt with according to the rigour of the law ; and that the debt we owe on account of our unhallowed infirmities shall never be required at our hands.]

A further obligation he has conferred upon us, in that,

III. He has defeated all our spiritual enemies—

Satan and all his hosts are combined against us—

^e Mic. vii. 19.

[They have usurped a power over us, and governed us with most despotic sway^f — — —]

But Christ has completely triumphed over them upon his cross—

[As a conqueror, he invaded the empire of Satan, and rescued millions of the human race from his dominion. He “spoiled the principalities and powers” of hell, and seized as his prey the souls of which they had so long held an undisturbed possession^g. It was upon his cross that he effected this: for there it was that he satisfied divine justice; there it was he fulfilled and cancelled the obligations of the law; there it was that he paid the price of our salvation. “He redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us^h.” His triumph was then complete. Like a victorious general leading in chains the distinguished personages whom the chance of war had put into his hands, our blessed Lord exhibited, as it were, to the view of God, of angels, and of his believing people, the vanquished powers of darkness: “he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them upon his cross.” He did not indeed, like earthly conquerors, exult in victories gained by the sword of others, and at the expense of their blood: his triumphs were gained by no sword but his, and with the loss of no blood but his: “His own arm brought salvation; and he trod the wine-press of God’s wrath aloneⁱ.”]

INFER—

1. What a wonderful sight is the cross of Christ!

[The eye of sense can behold nothing in it but an instrument of punishment, and a person suffering upon it as a malefactor. But what will the eye of faith behold? It will discern, not a sufferer, but a conqueror; not one raised on an accursed tree, but exalted on a triumphant car: not one crowned with thorns, but wearing a wreath of victory: not one nailed and bleeding, but one blotting out with blood, and cancelling with nails, the bonds that were against his chosen people: not one himself a spectacle, but exhibiting to view his vanquished enemies: not the despised Nazarene, but “the Lord of glory.” Strange as it may sound, we affirm, that it was not Jesus, but the prince of this world that was then judged^k, cast out^l, destroyed^m: for it was *then* that Jesus “bruised the serpent’s headⁿ.” “by death he destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and delivered them who till that hour had been all their life-time subject to

^f Eph. ii. 2. and 2 Tim. ii. 26.

^g Luke xi. 22. Isai. liii. 12.

^h Gal. iii. 13.

ⁱ Isai. lxiii. 3, 5.

^k John xvi. 11.

^l John xii. 31.

^m Heb. ii. 14.

ⁿ Gen. iii. 15.

bondage^o." Prostrate before him lay the principalities and powers of hell. Yes, Satan, it was thy power that was then broken, thy shame that was then exposed, thy doom that was then irrevocably sealed. Thou art now an object of our contempt; and the weakest amongst us will set his feet upon thy neck, and tremble at thee no more^p. "Thou art fallen, O Lucifer, son of the morning;" "thou art fallen from heaven like lightning;" and lower still shalt thou fall; for we thy once infatuated vassals can triumph over thee now; and thou shalt "ere long be bruised under our feet^q."

Beloved brethren, "turn aside and see this great sight,"—your triumphing Lord, and your despoiled enemies! Nor cease to contemplate it, till you are filled with admiration, and gratitude, and joy.]

2. What folly is it to suffer ourselves to be diverted from it!

[This is the particular improvement which the Apostle himself makes of the passage. He had guarded the Colossians against the sceptical pride of philosophers^r; and he proceeds to guard them against the self-justifying pride of Judaizing teachers^s. To the one of these the cross of Christ was a stumbling-block, and to the other foolishness; but to those who viewed it aright, it was "the power of God and the wisdom of God^t." Thus at this time we are particularly in danger of being led away from the simplicity of the Gospel, either by the conceits of philosophy, falsely so called, or by the observance of a formal round of duties. But let nothing draw your attention from the cross of Christ. It is *by that only* that you can be quickened: *by that only* you can be forgiven: *by that only* you can obtain deliverance from the penal sanction of the law, or victory over the enemies of your salvation. When you can find another object, or other principles, that can effect these things, then we consent that you shall disregard the cross of Christ. But till then, determine to know nothing^u, trust in nothing^x, glory in nothing^y, but Christ, and him crucified.]

^o Heb. ii. 14. and Ps. lxxviii. 18.

^p Josh. x. 24.

^q Rom. xvi. 20.

^r ver. 8.

^s ver. 16.

^t 1 Cor. i. 23, 24.

^u 1 Cor. ii. 2.

^x Phil. iii. 9.

^y Gal. vi. 14.

MMCLXXIX.

THE NATURE AND USE OF THE TYPES.

Col. ii. 17. *Which are a shadow of things to come ; but the body is of Christ.*

MAN is naturally addicted to superstition ; partly from a consciousness of his needing mercy from God, and partly from a desire of reconciling himself to God by some meritorious services of his own. The Jewish economy had rather a tendency to foster this disposition, inasmuch as it prescribed many rites and ceremonies as means of acceptance with God. But from these the Gospel has set us free ; and, in so doing, has introduced a more free and liberal spirit. Nevertheless, even under the light of the Gospel, we are prone to indulge the same servile desires, and to prefer a yoke of bondage to the freedom of God's children. Such was the case with many even in the apostolic age. St. Paul is cautioning the Colossians against two sorts of teachers, who were endeavouring to mislead them ; against the advocates for heathen philosophy^a, and against the Judaizing brethren, who insisted on the observance of the Mosaic ritual^b. In opposition to the latter of these, he bids the Christians to assert their liberty from the observances of the ceremonial law, *that* being, in fact, no more than a shadow, of which they now possessed the substance.

We shall take occasion from his words to shew,

I. The nature of the types—

The Scripture sets before us several kinds of types—

[Christians are in general but little acquainted with the types : yet the scripture abounds with them, and mentions various kinds of them. They may be reduced to three classes ; *natural*, *historical*, and *legal*. The *natural* are such as may be seen in the works of nature (in this view, the creation of the universe is a type of the new creation, which the regenerate soul experiences through the word and Spirit of God ;) the *historical* are such as Moses, Joshua, David, and others ; and the *legal* are all the ceremonies of the Jewish law.]

^a ver. 8.

^b ver. 16.

These are shadowy representations of Christ and his benefits—

[All of them relate to Christ in some view or other; either to his person and offices, or to his Church and the benefits he confers upon it. They are the shadow, whereof he is the substance: and as a shadow represents, though but faintly, the image of the substance, so they portray, though in a very indistinct manner, the character and work of Christ.]

In fact, they were instituted of God for this end—

[The paschal feast, with all its attendant observances, was not merely commemorative of a deliverance that was past: it was to shadow forth an infinitely greater deliverance that was to come; as St. Paul says, “Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth^c.” In like manner, we are told, that all the ordinances relative to the priestly office “served unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: For, see, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewn to thee in the mount^d.” The Law was the shadow; the Gospel the substance: the Law was the model; and the Gospel the edifice erected in perfect accordance with it^e.]

The text, in connexion with the context, leads us further to declare,

II. Their use—

God would not have appointed them, if they had not been beneficial to his Church. But with respect to the Jewish and the Christian Church, we shall, as they subserved different purposes, notice their use to each:

1. To the Jews—

^c Heb. viii. 5. 1 Cor. v. 7, 8.

^d Heb. viii. 5.

^e We are not at liberty to consider every common similitude as a type, or to launch into the boundless ocean of conjecture: in some instances indeed observations drawn from analogy may be almost as convincing as the declarations of God himself: but it is safest to adhere to those points which Scripture has determined for us: in them we are in no danger of erring, and therefore can speak with precision and authority. Nor should we ever forget, that, as those things alone are *sacraments to us* which God has appointed to be so, so those things alone were *types to the Jewish church*, which God instituted for that express purpose.

[*The types served to shew them what sort of a person their Messiah should be: he was to be a Prophet, like unto Moses, a Priest, like Aaron, a King, like David. He was to be a suffering no less than a reigning Messiah. They further kept up the expectation of him in the world. The first promise had been nearly forgotten; and most probably the repetition of it would have made but a transient impression: but the multitude of observances, daily repeated, and continually directing the eyes of the worshippers to him, could not fail of exciting a general and increasing expectation of his advent. They moreover led the people to exercise faith on him. Every intelligent worshipper must see that the blood of bulls and of goats could not take away sin; and therefore (as we are sure Abraham, David, and others did) the devout Jews must look through the ordinances to Christ, and rely on him who was to come, just as we rely on him who is come.*]

2 To us—

[*The types are of signal use to us, in that they testify of Christ as the person promised from the foundation of the world, and prefigured in the whole of the Mosaic ritual. When we compare the account of Christ in the New Testament with the various ordinances of the Old, we see how impossible it was that such a coincidence of character should ever happen, but by the express ordination and appointment of God. But they are of further use to us also, in that they wonderfully illustrate the fulness and excellency of Christ. As there are myriads of stars, yet all of them together are no more than a taper in comparison of the sun; so all the typical exhibitions of Christ are but a shadow in comparison of him: and “though they are exceeding glorious in themselves, yet have they no glory by reason of the glory that excelleth^f.” To this effect the Apostle says, “If the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God^g!” This is the view which we are to take of the types, this the improvement we are to make of them. We could not have formed any adequate idea of Christ’s work and offices, if we had not been assisted by the typical institutions: these serve to embody our notions, and to make them, like a picture, visible to the eyes of men, and therefore intelligible to the meanest capacity: whereas, if we could not thus invest them, as it were, with matter, we could only offer to our hearers some abstract ideas, which, after all, would convey but little meaning, and leave no abiding impression.*]

^f 2 Cor. iii. 9—11.

^g Heb. ix. 13, 14.

INFER—

1. How great are the privileges of the Christian Church !

[The Jews were oppressed with a yoke of ceremonies, which they were not able to bear—the import of which they could very faintly discern—and the observance of which yielded no permanent satisfaction to their consciences^h: but we are freed from that yoke, and enjoy a dispensation of light, and liberty———Let us be thankful for our privilege, and “stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free.”]

2. What spirituality of mind should we possess !

[Our superior privileges doubtless demand a correspondent pre-eminence in our spirit and conduct. If we are “no longer servants but sons,” we ought to manifest a filial affection towards God, and a delight in his service. But do not many of the pious Jews reproach us? O let us walk worthy of our high vocation, and shew forth the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous lightⁱ.]

^h Heb. x. 1, 2.

ⁱ 1 Pet. ii. 9.

MMCLXXX.

HOLDING THE HEAD.

Col. ii. 19. *Not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.*

WHILST the Apostles were yet in the full exercise of their ministry, all manner of heresies sprang up in the Church. The Jewish converts brought with them their partiality for the Mosaic ritual, and insisted on the continued observance of it: and the heathen converts introduced the dogmas of their philosophy; on which they insisted, as rendering Christianity more conformable with the sentiments to which they had been accustomed. Hence the Apostle Paul, in the chapter before us, repeatedly cautioned the Colossian saints against both the one and the other of these heretical deceivers. “Beware,” says he, “lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments

of the world, and not after Christ^a." Again, "Let no man judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy-day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath-days; which are a shadow of things to come: but the body is of Christ^b." And then, in reference to both the characters, he says, "Let no man beguile you of your reward, in a voluntary humility, and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the Head." It seems that some of the Jewish converts were inclined to rely on angels, as their mediators with God; for God having employed them in the dispensation of his law, they thought it probable that he would make use of them as his instruments also in communicating the blessings of the Gospel. With the heathen converts, the idea of an intermediate kind of deity was quite familiar; and, consequently, coalescing easily with the Jewish teachers in their veneration of angels, they formed, in the Church, a party, which it required all the zeal and authority of the Apostle to suppress. It was to counteract their influence that the Apostle suggested, in the words of my text,

I. A solemn caution not to depart from Christ—

It is here taken for granted, that Christians are all united to Christ by faith, as their living Head. But the Apostle declared, that the persons who were thus endeavouring to subvert the faith of the Colossians did not hold Christ as their Head; and that to embrace their sentiments would, in effect, be to renounce Christ. And

This was true with respect to them at that time—

[To worship angels, and employ them as mediators with God, was indeed proposed under an idea of "humility;" since it was supposed, that it would be presumptuous in man to apply directly to God, except through the intervention of some creatures of a higher stamp and order; but if they came to him through them as their mediators, they could not then fail of obtaining the Divine favour. But, whilst this was

^a ver. 8.

^b ver. 16, 17.

recommended as an indication of humility, it proceeded, in fact, from nothing but pride: for, by "intruding into things which they had not seen," and presuming to go beyond what God had revealed, they shewed that they were "vainly puffed up by their fleshly mind." And, in recommending the adoption of these sentiments, they did eventually "rob men of their reward," instead of securing it to them by any additional bonds. In truth, they did not themselves "hold fast the Head," the Lord Jesus Christ; and, so far as they prevailed, they actually severed persons from Christ; and thereby ruined their immortal souls.]

And it is equally true with respect to many at this time—

[The whole Romish Church sanctions the worshipping both of saints and angels: and, not content with having Christ as their mediator, they make use of the Virgin Mary as their intercessor; and place as much confidence in her, as in the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Need I say, what is the origin of this, or what its effect will be? It is recommended under a pretence of "humility:" but it is the offspring of pride and carnality; it is recommended in order to secure the reward of heaven; but it beguiles of that reward all who embrace so fatal a system.

And what are they better, who require some internal qualifications in us, as a warrant for us to apply to Christ? The *Papists* commend *new mediators to us*, in order to our obtaining of acceptance with Christ; and these other deceivers require *new qualifications in us* for the same end. And these, no less than the former, go beyond the Scriptures, requiring of us what God himself has never required. All the qualification which God requires for our approach to Christ is, that we thirst after him, and be willing to accept his proffered benefits: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and *drink*:" and "Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely." The substitution of any other terms, whatever men may pretend, is the fruit of pride: for it is an avowal, that we look for mercy at his hand as the reward of some kind or degree of goodness in ourselves; and, in effect, it transfers a portion at least of his glory to ourselves. It denies the entire freeness of divine grace, and makes salvation in part to be of works. The consequence of this will be, that all who are thus led to renounce their hold of Christ, must perish. They are beguiled of their reward, and betrayed to their everlasting ruin.]

To this solemn caution is annexed,

II. A most urgent reason for adhering to him—

It is by union with the Lord Jesus Christ that the whole Church subsists—

[There is the same union betwixt Christ and his Church as there is betwixt the head and members of the natural body. From the head the vital spirits may be said to flow throughout the whole body: nourishing every part, diffusing strength throughout the whole system, and combining all the members, so as to call forth and concentrate their respective offices for the good of the whole. Thus it is that all the members of Christ's mystical body receive life and strength from him: all are fitted for the discharge of their several duties: all are made to possess one common interest, and to act for one common end. There is not one life in the head, and another in the members: it is one life that pervades them all: and *this*, too, in the mystical body of Christ, no less than in our own natural body. It is “not *we* that live, but Christ that liveth in us^c” yea, “Christ himself is our life^d” and by his continued agency within us, we “increase with the increase of God.”

What then must be the event, if we be cut off from him? We perish of necessity, as the members when severed from the head. Is this, then, no reason why we should guard against the introduction of error, especially of such errors as will have the effect of separating us from him?

But we may further observe, that,]

It is by union with Christ that the whole work of grace is carried on in the soul of every believer—

[As there is “a body of sin, called the old man,” in us by nature, so is there “a new man” in us by grace: and all the different graces, of which this new man consists, are nourished by the same divine principle; and either decline or grow together, according as this is communicated to us, or withheld. A man may have in his natural body a greater measure of force and vigour in some one organ or member than in others: the eye, the ear, the hand, the foot, may possess some appropriate and distinguished excellence: but, whatever affects the system generally, must affect the body in every part, and produce a corresponding diminution or increase of its powers. Now, if our connexion with the Lord Jesus Christ is kept close, and our communications from him abound, we shall have all our graces lively, and vigorous, and active: but if there be any thing to intercept the communications of his grace, every grace will languish and decay.

Say, then, whether in this view also we are not concerned

^c Gal. ii. 20.

^d Col. iii. 4.

with all care and diligence to “hold fast the Head?” Whether we consider the interests of the Church collectively, or the welfare of every individual believer, there does appear a necessity to watch against any interruption of our union with Christ, and to seek from him incessant supplies of grace and strength: for “through him we can do all things^e,” but “without him we can do nothing^f.”]

BEHOLD from hence,

1. How wonderfully simple is the Gospel of Christ!

[If we enter into the deep mysteries of religion in an abstract way, the wisest and most acute are soon out of their depth: but if we take them as represented by Scripture images, the weakest and most ignorant Christian has as clear a conception of them as the most learned in the universe. The connexion between the head and the body, and the dependence of the members on the head, may be more scientifically described by a learned man; but they are not a whit more justly apprehended by him, than by the poorest of mankind. Yet does this image contain the whole of vital Christianity; which consists in this one thing, “a life of faith on the Son of God, as having loved us, and given himself for us.” Beloved brethren, take with you this image: conceive of the Lord Jesus Christ as your head, from whom all vital influence proceeds. Look to him for a communication of that influence to your soul. Bear in mind, that, except as aided by power from him, you can do no more than your members could if separated from your head. Remember, that as every member of your body is alike under the influence of your head, so must every disposition of your soul be under the controul and influence of Christ: and, as there is no schism in the body, no member affecting independence, or living regardless of the head, so let there be no want of attention to any individual grace; but go to Him for a supply of all, that all may be strengthened, and that you may grow up in all things into Christ, your living head. Let your wisdom, your righteousness, your sanctification, your complete redemption, be all viewed as *in him*, and all be derived continually from him, according to the measure of the gift which he sees fit to impart.]

2. The danger of departing from it in the least degree—

[The persons who proposed the worshipping of angels did not *mean* to renounce Christ; and had they been told that their conceit was in reality a separation of themselves from him, they would have denied that any such consequences could

^e Phil. iv. 13.

^f John xv. 5.

follow. And so it is when persons are looking for some goodness of their own whereon to found their hope, or *to warrant their application to Christ*; they have as little idea of the evil which they commit, or of the consequences that must ensue. But remember, that *self* must be altogether renounced; must be renounced by us, as much as it must by the fallen angels, if salvation were at this moment offered to them. All that we ever can have, is in Christ: it is treasured up in him for our use, and must be received from him. There is not any thing which must not be "received out of his fulness:" and, if you will not come to him for it, you must inevitably and eternally perish. He is a jealous God: he will not admit of rivals: he will not endure that his glory should in any respect or degree be given to another. Whatever, therefore, any man may pretend, or whatever specious appearance any sentiment may assume, whether of superior wisdom, or deeper humility, or more ardent zeal, admit nothing, for one moment, that may interfere with the honour of the Lord Jesus: but be contented to receive all from him, to depend altogether upon him, and to give him the glory of all that you either receive or do. In a word, be to him what your members are to your head. This idea is extremely simple. Suffer nothing to set it aside, or to interfere with it. Carry it into effect in your daily life and conversation: and fear not, but that if you glorify him in this world, you shall be glorified with him in the world above.]

MMCLXXXI.

OUR RESURRECTION WITH CHRIST A MOTIVE TO HEAVENLY-MINDEDNESS.

Col. iii. 1. *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.*

ONE of the most distinguished peculiarities of our holy religion is, that it suggests entirely new motives to action. The inducements which reason could offer, were (as all antiquity proves) altogether weak and inefficient — — — Those alone which Christianity proposes are capable of restraining the passions of men, and of regulating their conduct. Beg of God then that you may feel the power of his word, whilst I set before you,

I. The duty here inculcated—

I by no means must be understood as intimating, that we are at liberty to neglect our earthly concerns. Circumstanced as we are, we must of necessity devote much time and labour to the pursuit of worldly things : and, if we neglected them, we should offend against the order of Divine Providence, who has said in reference to them, “Six days shalt thou labour.” But

“The things which are above” are most worthy of our pursuit—

[Amongst these we must number the *favour of our offended God*, the *manifestations of his love to our souls*, the *attainment of his image*, and the *possession of his glory*.

Which of these things can be dispensed with? — — — or which can be attained by a mere inactive wish, or by a formal and faint endeavour? — — — These things, in point of value and importance, as far excel all earthly things, as the splendour of the meridian sun eclipses the faint radiance of the glow-worm.]

These therefore we are to seek with our whole hearts—

[They are to have the first place in our esteem, and to be sought with a diligence proportioned to their value^a. *Seeking* only will not suffice; we must *strive* to enter in at the strait gate; for we are told that “many shall *seek*, and not be able^b.” “The kingdom of heaven must be taken by violence^c,” even by the holy violence of faith and prayer. The things *above* must be sought with the same constancy and zeal as are employed by the world in the pursuit of things *below*. Worldly men are never weary in the pursuit of *their* objects. From the earliest dawn to the very hour when they retire to rest, their appetite for earthly things continues; nor, whatever they may attain, are they ever satisfied. Their *energies* may be enfeebled by labour; but their *taste* is still the same: they savour the things which pertain to time and sense^d,—them constantly, them supremely, them only. Now this is the way in which we should “seek the things that are above:” and, in comparison of these, all earthly things should be to us as dung and dross. Even life itself should be of no value, if by sacrificing it our eternal interests may be improved^e.]

If this appear “an hard saying,” attend while I lay before you,

^a Matt. vi. 33.

^b Luke xiii. 24.

^c Matt. xi. 12.

^d Rom. viii. 5.

^e Luke xiv. 26, 27, 33.

II. The considerations with which it is enforced—

The Apostle urges upon us our duty *on the ground of consistency*. Mark,

1. Your professions—

[The word “If” does not express any doubt in the Apostle’s mind, but imports *an acknowledged fact*, viz. that the Christian *is* risen with Christ. It is the same as if he had said, “*Since ye are* risen with Christ.” Now every Christian *is* risen with Christ both *federally*, and *spiritually*. Christ is his federal Head and Representative: and all that *He* experienced, *we* experienced *in him*. Was he circumcised when a child? Was he at the close of life crucified, dead, and buried? Did he rise, and ascend to heaven? And is he now sitting at the right hand of God? In the whole of this we had, not an interest only, but a direct participation^f. Exactly as we died in Adam, partaking, as it were, with him in the sin which, as our head and representative, he committed, so all which Christ did and suffered is imputed to us, as though we had ourselves done and suffered it in him^g. *Spiritually* also are we risen in Christ. All that he did and suffered is, if I may so speak, accomplished personally in every one of us, his *corporeal* acts and sufferings being *the model* of what we experience in our souls. This is by St. Paul stated with great accuracy. In his prayer for the Ephesian Church, he desires that they may “know what is the exceeding greatness of God’s power in all his believing people, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places.” And then he marks distinctly and separately the work which God accomplishes in his people, quickening them from the dead, raising them up to newness of life, and setting them together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus^h.”

Now then I ask, Is not this what *as Christians* you profess? Do you not profess to be thus risen with Christ, interested in all that he did and suffered for you, and bound to be conformed to him in the whole of this his mediatorial work and office. *You do profess it*, whether you intend it or not. And *this profession binds you* to an entire devotedness of heart and life to God. You must of necessity “thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, *that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again*.”

But you shall see this on authority that cannot be disputed, and *actually urged in the very way suggested by my text*.

^f Col. ii. 10—12.

^g 1 Cor. xv. 22. 2 Cor. v. 21.

^h Eph. i. 19, 20. with ii. 4—6.

ⁱ 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

"What shall we say then; Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. *How shall we that are dead to sin* (as we all profess to be) *live any longer therein?* Know ye not, that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death? *Therefore* we are buried with him by baptism into death; that *like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life*^k."

The point then is proved. CONSISTENCY requires that you should seek primarily and with your whole hearts the things above.

If yet you entertain a doubt of this, I ask you, what judgment you yourselves pass on a carnal, sensual, worldly-minded professor of religion? Do you not condemn *him* as inconsistent? Then in so doing you pass judgment on yourselves.]

2. Your expectations—

[The words, "Where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God," are not added casually and without design: they give exceeding great weight and emphasis to all that precedes. These words express the *expectations* of the Christian, as the former do his *professions*. "Christ is at the right hand of God," the seat of honour and of power. But he is not there as a mere individual for his own happiness only. He is there prosecuting still the work which he began on earth, and in which we are as much interested as we are in what he did and suffered here below. We look to him to afford us all needful aid by the constant supplies of his Spirit and grace^l." We look to him to obtain for us the acceptance of our poor imperfect services^m. We look to him to come again and take us in due season to a full participation of all the glory which he himself possessesⁿ. But in which of these shall we succeed, if we do not live to him? If we were to tell you, that a worldly and carnal life was the way to obtain these blessings, would you not cry out against us as "blind leaders of the blind?" Then behold what your expectations are, and how powerfully they proclaim and enforce your duties. If "your faith and hope depend altogether upon the exaltation of Christ to the right hand of God," your duty must of necessity be to look to him continually, that you may receive out of his fulness all that your necessities require.]

And now SEE,

1. How few real Christians there are upon earth—

^k Rom. vi. 1—11. ^l John xvi. 7—11. 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9.

^m 1 Pet. ii. 5.

ⁿ John xvi. 23. and xvii. 24. and Rev. iii. 21.

^o 1 Pet. i. 21.

[If *they* were Christians who were conformed to Christ in his *entombed* state, and who sought only the things *below*, there would be no lack of them in every place: but if those only be Christians who in heart and life are *risen* with Christ, and who seek only the things *above*, then are they few indeed. Brethren, try yourselves by these marks, and you shall soon find your real character before God — — — But know ye this of a truth, that, whatever you may think to the contrary, they only who live *to* Christ in this world, shall ever live *with* him in the world to come.]

2. How blessed are they who are Christians indeed—

[Being risen with Christ, their lives are hid with Christ in God, beyond the reach of men or devils^p. While they are engaged in heavenly pursuits, they may enjoy the security which God has ordained for them. Oppositions, indeed, and difficulties they must expect; but Christ will not lose one member of his mystical body. He derides the vain attempts of his enemies and ours. We too may defy the confederate powers of earth and hell^q: for, however they may obtain a temporary triumph, their efforts shall terminate in their own confusion. With Christ we shall rise victorious; and “when he who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory^r.”]

^p ver. 3.

^q Rom. viii. 33, 34.

^r ver. 4.

MMCLXXXII.

HEAVENLY-MINDEDNESS.

Col. iii. 2. *Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.*

IT seems harsh and paradoxical, to say that Christianity is very imperfectly understood amongst us. Respecting its mysterious *doctrines*, perhaps, the allegation would be admitted without difficulty: but respecting its *precepts*, scarcely any one would suspect that the observation could have any foundation in truth. But it is to the preceptive part especially that I intend the remark to be applied: and I think that, before I have closed my present subject, the greater part of you will agree with me, that the sentiment is just. The morality of Christians in general

goes only to the conduct of men so far as it is visible to those around us: but the Christian code extends to the inmost feelings of the soul; and requires a conformity to the Saviour himself, not only in the dispositions of his mind whilst he sojourned upon earth, but in the change wrought upon him in his exaltation to heaven: it requires us to be dead *to* sin as truly as ever he died *for* sin; and to live as truly and entirely to God as he did, and yet does, in his risen state in glory. The precept which you have just heard will fitly illustrate this truth. I will endeavour to mark,

I. Its import—

Directions in Scripture are often put in a way of contrast, when they are to be understood only in a way of comparison. Such, for instance, is the declaration, “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.” We are not to understand that passage as prohibiting sacrifices, which had been expressly enjoined, and were yet of necessity to be offered; but only as expressing an approbation of acts of mercy, even though they should supersede the observance of some positive injunction. When our Lord says, “Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for the meat that endureth unto everlasting life,” he must not be understood as discouraging an attention to worldly business: for God has authoritatively commanded, “Six days shalt thou labour.” It is in a comparative sense only that his words must be understood: and in the same manner must we interpret also the words before us. Mark,

1. The things here contrasted—

[“The things which are on earth” are those which relate to this present life. Even intellectual pursuits must be included, no less than the pleasures, or riches, or honours, of the world. On the other hand, by “the things which are above,” we must understand every thing relating to the soul, its first acceptance with God, its progressive restoration to the Divine image, and its final possession of the heavenly glory. The latter of these we are to pursue, if not exclusively, yet supremely, so as to shew that they have no rival whatever in our souls.

The term here translated "*Set your affections on things above,*" is more literally rendered, in the margin, "*Mind the things that are above.*" The term imports, not an exercise of the intellectual powers only, but also of the will and the affections; and such an exercise of them as demonstrates the supreme attachment of the soul. Perhaps it was on this account that our translators preferred the translation; which, though less proper in itself, more exactly conveyed the sense to those who were unacquainted with the original. But, not to separate the words, let us take them in their collective import; and consider,]

2. The precept relating to them—

[I have said, that *all* concern about earthly things is not forbidden: on the contrary, there are many things which require an ardour and intensity in the pursuit, and cannot be attained without. But they must not engage the affections of the soul; they must not be permitted to stand in competition with heaven and heavenly things. In comparison with the knowledge of Christ, all that the world contains must be in our eyes no better than "dung and dross." The favour of an offended God — — — the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ in all its sanctifying operations — — — the witness of the Holy Spirit testifying of our adoption into his family, and of our interest in Christ — — — and, finally, the eternal possession of his glory — — — What deserves to be sought after, like these? What will bear any comparison with these? These, then, are to occupy our supreme regard; and every thing else must give way to them. Earthly satisfactions of any kind, if they stand in competition with them, must all be sacrificed without hesitation and without regret. So permanent must be the ascendancy of these things in our minds, that no labour for them shall appear too great, and no suffering too intense. In comparison of them, even life itself must be of no value in our eyes, and the whole world be only as the small dust upon the balance.]

This precept does indeed appear to impose a duty that is quite impracticable: but, to shew that it deserves our most attentive regards, I will display,

II. Its reasonableness—

Let us take a more distinct survey of the two different objects which are here contrasted; and the preference required in behalf of heavenly things will be found precisely such as it becomes us to manifest. For,

1. They are more excellent in themselves—

[What is there truly valuable in the things of this world? They have no intrinsic worth: they are only good as being high in the estimation of men: an angel would disregard them all, as much as we should the dirt under our feet. Crowns, kingdoms, empires, what are they all, but the baubles of children, which a man in his senses would despise? Beyond food and raiment there is nothing worth a thought: and *they* derive their value, not from any thing in themselves, but from the necessities of our nature, which render them important in our eyes. But is there nothing real in the favour of God, the grace of Christ, the witness of the Spirit, and the glory of heaven? Yes, verily: these elevate our nature, and ennoble it, and raise it to its primitive perfection and blessedness. These things the highest angel in heaven cannot but approve; yea, he must account them as objects on which it is impossible to bestow too great, or too undivided, an attention.]

2. They are more satisfactory to our minds—

[They who possess the most of this world are the very persons who most feel the emptiness and vanity of it all. Go to those who have attained all that their hearts could desire, and ask them whether they have not grasped a shadow? A name, a title, a ribbon of distinction, what contemptible things, in comparison of those which belong to the soul! Who that possesses them does not feel an aching void in his bosom, unless with them he possesses also the favour of God? “In the midst of his sufficiency, he is in straits.” But the blessings of which we have before spoken, are solid; and the person who enjoys them, possesses rest in his soul. “Having drunk of the living waters, he thirsts no more” for any thing besides.]

3. They are more conducive to our happiness—

[Are the rich and great happier than other people? Not a wit. A Lazarus, with God’s love shed abroad in his heart, is happier than the Rich Man amongst all his banquets. Search the Scriptures, and see whether those who have revelled most in their wealth, and drunk most deeply of the cup of pleasure, have not pronounced it all, not merely vanity, but vexation of spirit also? But look at the possessors of spiritual good: take them in their lowest state; view them poor, and weeping, and mourning, and hungering and thirsting after degrees of holiness unattained: what says the Scripture respecting them? What? Our Saviour himself declares them “blessed,” “blessed,” “blessed,” “blessed.” If, like Paul and Silas, they are reduced to the most pitiable condition that can be conceived, they have ample ground for the most exalted joy: and even in martyrdom itself they have no cause for any thing but self-congratulation, thanksgiving, and praise.]

4. They are more easily to be attained—

[Multitudes, however much they were to labour, could never gain earthly distinction: and multitudes who do labour for it with a reasonable hope of success, are left a prey to the most painful disappointments. But who that has the heart of a man is incapable of acquiring heavenly blessings? or who ever failed in attaining them, provided he only sought them in humility and faith? Methinks this is one of the chief excellencies of spiritual things, that they are open alike to all, and never are sought in vain. Of them, in all their fulness, we may say, “Every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth: and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.”]

5. They are more lasting—

[Let a man possess the whole world; how long shall he retain it? Every moment his happiness is drawing nearer to a close: no sooner is the breath departed from his body, than he surrenders it all to some new possessor, who shall, like him also, retain it but a little time: for “we can carry nothing away with us when we die:” we came naked into the world, and naked must we depart from it. But is it thus with the man who has sought his happiness in God? No, verily: “he has treasures in heaven;” and at death he goes to the full possession of them. His happiness, instead of being terminated at death, is then consummated: he then, as it were, comes of age, and enters on the full possession of “his inheritance, which is incorruptible and undefiled, and fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for him.”]

And now let me ask, Is it unreasonable that *these* things should occupy your minds, in preference to the vanities of time and sense? these things, which are so excellent in themselves, so satisfactory to us, so conducive to our happiness, so certain to be attained, and so lasting in the enjoyment? Surely the poor empty vanities of time and sense cannot, for a moment, stand in competition with these; nor do they deserve so much as a thought, in comparison of them.]

Let me now COMMEND this precept to you,

1. As a test to try your character—

[In this view it is particularly set before us by St. Paul: “They that are of the flesh, do *mind* the things after the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit^a.” Now, here the very same term is used as in our text: and it forms a line of distinction between the carnal and the spiritual man, between “him who is in a state of death, and him who

^a Rom. viii. 5.

is in the enjoyment of life and peace^b." It may be thought, indeed, that the adoption of evangelical sentiments, and the making an open profession of piety, will supersede this test: but nothing can ever set it aside. The Philippian converts judged that they were in a state of acceptance with God, because they professed faith in Christ: but, respecting many of them, St. Paul said, "Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and tell you now even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction:" and then, assigning the reasons for his judgment, he combines with other things this charge; "They *mind* earthly things^c." I call every one of you, then, to try yourselves by this infallible mark. It is a point easily ascertained. You need only examine your lives from day to day; and see what it is that interests you most, and forms the leading objects of your pursuit. You may be deeply engaged about earthly things, and yet be right in the sight of God, provided heavenly things be regarded by you with supreme and paramount affection. Bring then, I pray you, this matter to a trial; and never cease to implore of God that spiritual discernment which He alone can give, and that uprightness of heart which is indispensable to the forming of a right judgment.]

2. As a rule, to regulate your conduct—

[Verily, *this* must distinguish every child of God: though *in* the world, we must not be *of* it: "our conversation must be in heaven." This is our *duty* — — — our honour — — — our happiness — — — our security — — — There is no standing still in religion. If we advance not, we recede. Be not contented to rest in a low state, but "press forward for the highest attainments in holiness; forgetting all that is behind, and reaching forward to that which is before, till you have fully attained the prize of your high calling."]

^b Rom. viii. 5.

^c Phil. iii. 18, 19.

MMCLXXXIII.

THE EXALTED STATE OF A CHRISTIAN.

Col. iii. 3, 4. *Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.*

INNUMERABLE are the advantages which revelation gives us over the heathen philosophers: for, whilst it discovers to us a much sublimer rule of conduct than they were able to devise, it affords motives

sufficient to incline us to duty, and teaches us where to obtain strength for the performance of it. The duty it enjoins is nothing less than a supreme delight in heavenly things: but at the same time it animates us by the consideration of the privileges we enjoy and the prospects we have in view. What the Christian possesses in these respects may be seen in the words before us: in which we notice,

I. His exalted state—

The Christian is a paradox; being both dead and living at the same time. He is “dead”—

[Once he was alive wholly and entirely to *legal hopes* and *carnal enjoyments*: but now is dead to both. He now sees that he has no righteousness of his own for his justification before God, and no strength of his own for the fulfilment of God's holy will: he therefore renounces all dependence on himself, and seeks righteousness and strength in Christ alone^a — — —

As for the enjoyment of the things of time and sense, he has the same capacity for it as ever; but he has lost his inclination for it, and no longer seeks his happiness in it. He feels the emptiness and vanity of all sublunary good: and, whilst he is thankful for the portion of it that is committed to him, he regards the whole world as an object that is crucified, and is himself crucified unto it^b — — —]

Yet is he alive in a far higher sense than ever he was before—

[He has in Christ a “life,” whereby he is enabled to live unto his God, and to walk in the paths of holiness and peace — — — This life is “hid with Christ in God;” so that, whilst the world seeth it not, Satan is not able to destroy it. When Adam had life, so to speak, in his own possession, his great adversary prevailed over him and slew him: the believer therefore is placed beyond the reach of Satan's efforts, and has his life treasured up in heaven, whither Satan has no access, and in God, over whom he can have no power — — — Indeed Christ himself liveth in the believer^c, and is “his very life.” What the soul is to the body, that is Christ to the believer's soul, acting in all its faculties, and operating in all its energies — — — And hence the believer, however dead he is in himself, is enabled to live in a way that no other creature in the universe can live.]

^a Isai. xlv. 24.

^b Gal. vi. 14.

^c Gal. ii. 20.

But the believer must be yet further viewed by us in,

II. His glorious expectations—

The Saviour, though once as unknown by the world as they, and still more despised, shall one day appear again in glory—

[The time is fast approaching, when he shall descend from heaven in his own glory, and in the glory of his Father and his holy angels. Whilst he was upon earth, his glory was, for the most part, veiled. A little of it shined forth on Mount Tabor; and his own more immediate followers “beheld somewhat of his glory, as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father.” But “the world knew him not:” “the darkness could not apprehend his light:” but in the day of judgment his appearance will be such as becomes his august character, so that he will be equally acknowledged by all, whether friends or enemies, as “King of kings and Lord of lords”— — —]

Then will the whole assembly of believers appear with him in glory—

[They will be gathered from every quarter of the globe “to meet their Lord in the air,” every one of them with “bodies like unto his glorious body,” and souls like unto his glorified soul: for they will be altogether “like him, when they shall see him as he is^d.” They will then appear as *monuments of his grace*, as *trophies of his victory*, as *heirs of his glory*. Truly he will be admired and glorified in them, when it shall be seen what sovereignty he has exercised in the choice of them, and what power he has put forth for their salvation^e. It will then be seen, not that *they* triumphed, but that *he* triumphed *for* them, (upon his cross^f,) and *over* them, (by his converting grace^g,) and *in* them, by the sanctifying efficacy of his Word and Spirit^h— — — Then will they be seated with him upon his throne, and as “joint-heirs with him” be partakers of his kingdom for evermore— — —]

Of this the present state of their souls justifies an assured expectation—

[The connexion between the two parts of my text must on no account be overlooked. Both “the death” of the saints, and “their life” warrant an assurance, that they shall reign with Christ in glory. Who can hurt the soul of one that is dead? So neither can any one destroy a soul that is

^d 1 John iii. 2.

^e 2 Thess. i. 10.

^f Col. i. 15.

^g Ps xlv. 5. 2 Cor. x. 5.

^h John x. 28.

“dead to sin:” in both cases, the soul is hid with Christ in God. Again, when our life was committed to the keeping of the first Adam, he, though perfect, and in Paradise, suffered it to be wrested from him by the subtilty of Satan. To prevent a recurrence of such a calamity, our renewed life is not committed to our own care, but is treasured up in the second Adam, and is hid with Christ in God, out of the reach of any enemy. Who then shall prevail against us? Not all the powers of earth or hell shall effect our ruin: “our life being hid with Christ in God,” we are placed beyond the reach of evil; and *therefore* may be sure, that when he shall appear again to judge the world, we also shall appear with him in glory. *This* seems to be the true import of the passage; and nothing less than this will adequately convey to our minds the security and blessedness of a believing soul — — —]

ADDRESS—

1. Let believers be sensible of the distinguished mercy vouchsafed unto them—

[“Who is like unto you, O people saved by the Lord?” Behold the unregenerate world: they are “dead,” it is true; but to what are they dead? Not to self, but to God and to every thing that concerns the soul; whilst you are dead to the law, and to sin, and to the world, and alive unto God, through Jesus Christ. Light and darkness are not more different from each other, than is the spiritual from the natural man, and the regenerate man from him that remains dead in trespasses and sins. And who has put the difference between you and the unbelieving world? Who has made you children of God and heirs of glory, whilst so many millions of your fellow-creatures have the wicked one for their father, and everlasting misery as their portion? Verily, if you do not bless and adore your God, and rend the air with your hosannahs, the very stones will cry out against you.]

2. Let them endeavour to walk worthy of their high calling—

[*This* is the entire scope both of the preceding and the following context. “Set your affections on things above,” “*for ye are dead,*” &c. Then after the text it is added, “Mortify *therefore* your members upon earth.” *This* should be the effect of all God’s mercies to us: and I call on every one who professes to have received life from Christ, to give evidence of that life, by “walking in all things as Christ walked” — — —]

MMCLXXXIV.

CHRIST IS ALL.

Col. iii. 11. *Christ is all, and in all.*

MEN are ever ready to value themselves upon their natural endowments, their civil distinctions, or their religious privileges; and to imagine that a pre-eminence in these things gives them some kind of claim to honour and respect, even from God himself. But nothing which a natural man can possess, will give him any such advantage over others as shall entitle him to boast, as though his salvation were in any measure of, or from, himself: the most learned "Greek" must be indebted to divine teaching as much as the unlettered "Scythian;" and the Jew that has been admitted into covenant with God by "circumcision," be as much saved by the blood and righteousness of Christ as an "uncircumcised" or idolatrous "barbarian:" the "free-man" has no superiority above the "slave;" all stand upon the same footing with respect to salvation; all without exception are dependent upon Christ for all their mercies: in all cases, relating to all persons, and to all the circumstances of each, the creature is nothing, and Christ is all; "he is all in all." We shall,

I. Illustrate this truth—

If we consult the Scriptures, or our own experience, Christ will be found ALL in procuring, imparting, maintaining, and completing our salvation.

1. In procuring it—

[Who amongst the sons of men first *suggested* to our Lord the plan of saving our ruined race through the sacrifice of himself? Who *assisted* him *in* performing the mighty work which he had undertaken? "Did he not tread the wine-press of God's wrath alone^a?" When he "finished transgression, made an end of sin, made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in an everlasting righteousness," "there was none with him;" "he looked and there was no man; therefore his own arm brought salvation^b." Who can *add* to the work

^a Isai. lxiii. 3.^b Isai. lix. 16.

which he has accomplished? Who can bring forth any works of supererogation or perfection that shall eke out his righteousness, or give weight and efficacy to his sacrifice? Surely Christ alone must be acknowledged as “the author of eternal salvation^c.”]

2. In imparting it—

[The state of mankind may be fitly compared to the dry bones in Ezekiel’s vision^d: they are altogether incapable of exerting themselves in the way of godliness, or of performing the functions of the spiritual life. He who commanded Lazarus to come forth from the grave, and who calls himself “the resurrection and the life,” must quicken them, or they will remain to all eternity “dead in trespasses and sins.” If “we choose him, and love him, it is because he has first chosen us, and loved us^e.” There is not a saint on earth that must not say, “By the grace of God, I am what I am^f.” “It is not of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, that we are born, but of God^g.” Through the pride of our hearts indeed, we are too apt to boast: but “who amongst us has any thing which he has not received^h?” Who must not trace up to God both his “disposition to will, and his ability to do” what is right and goodⁱ? Nothing but the most consummate pride can hinder us from confessing, that “salvation is, not of him that willeth, or of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy^k.” and that, “if we have been saved and called with an holy calling, it has not been according to our works, but according to God’s eternal purpose and grace^l.”]

3. In maintaining it—

[Nothing is more evident than our inability to maintain our natural life: however careful we be in the use of means, we cannot secure our bodies against the effects of disease or accident. The preservation of our spiritual life is yet further beyond the reach of our foresight or our skill. If left by God for one moment, we shall fall. If Adam, even in Paradise, yielded to temptation, notwithstanding he was a perfect man, how much more shall we, who are full of evil? St. Paul acknowledges that, notwithstanding all the grace he had received, he “had not in himself a sufficiency even to think a good thought^m.” As water ceases to flow when its communication with the fountain is cut off, or as light is instantly extinguished as soon as the rays of the sun are intercepted, so all spiritual life would cease in us for ever, if “*Christ, who is our*

^c Heb. v. 9.

^d Ezek. xxxvii. 1—3.

^e Jer. xxxi. 3. John xv. 16.

^f 1 Cor. xv. 10.

^g John i. 13.

^h 2 Cor. iv. 7.

ⁱ Phil. ii. 13.

^k Rom. ix. 16.

^l 2 Tim. i. 9.

^m 2 Cor. iii. 5.

*life*ⁿ," should for one instant withhold his quickening influence^o. From hence it is that we are necessitated to "live entirely by faith in the Son of God," and to "receive continually out of his fulness^p."

4. In completing it—

[While we continue in the body, we shall be as dependent upon Christ for every thing, as we have been at any period of our existence. He who has been "the author, must also be the *finisher* of our faith^q:" the same "Zerubbabel who laid the foundation of this spiritual work, must finish it with his own hands, in order that, when the head-stone shall be brought forth with shoutings, we may cry, Grace, grace unto it for ever^r." Indeed, it is not only to the end of life that Christ will carry on his work, but long after we have mouldered in the grave; "he will raise us up again at the last day^s," appoint us our proper portion, exalt us to his throne of glory, and be the continued source of our happiness through all eternity^t.]

This being a truth of infinite importance, we shall endeavour to,

II. Improve it—

It is not a mere assent to this doctrine that will profit our souls, but the application of it to our hearts and consciences. Let us then apply it—

1. For reproof—

In how strong a light does the guilt of *worldly* men appear when viewed through the medium of this truth! God assures us that no distinctions of whatever kind will effectually make us happy; and that the happiness of all must be altogether in, and through Christ. The worldling, on the contrary, declares, by his practice at least, that the world, and not Christ, is the true source of rational enjoyment. What is this but to "make God a liar?" and shall this be deemed a light offence in the day of judgment?— — But this subject more particularly condemns the *self-righteous*. These, instead of looking to Christ for the free, unmerited, and continued exercise of his grace, are ready to boast that they are not as other men, and to go forth in a dependence on their own strength and goodness: instead of regarding him as their entire "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption," they transfer much of his glory to themselves; instead of making

ⁿ Col. iii. 4.

^o John xv. 5. *Χωρὶς ἐμοῦ*.

^p Gal. ii. 20.

^q Heb. xii. 2.

^r Zech. iv. 7—9.

^s John vi. 39, 40.

^t Rev. vii. 17. and xxi. 23.

him their ALL, they make him almost NOTHING. Do such persons honour Christ? or can they expect to be honoured by him before the assembled universe? — — — Even *true believers* will see much cause to be ashamed, when they reflect how low their thoughts of Christ have been, and how cold their devoutest affections towards him — — — Above all, *the ministers of the Gospel*, even the most faithful amongst them, have reason to be ashamed. They know that they, who neglect Christ, neglect their *all*; and that the consequences of that neglect will be inexpressibly dreadful: should not then their “eyes run down with tears day and night for the pride” and ignorance of their people? Should they not “beseech them,” yea, and entreat God for them, with floods of tears, if that by any means they might prevail on some to embrace the Saviour? Have they not reason to tremble lest the blood of multitudes who perish should be required at their hands? Surely they, who are ready to condemn their zeal, should rather pity them, and pray for them, and encourage their activity to the utmost.]

2. For direction—

[*They who are inquiring*, what shall we do to be saved? have here the shortest and plainest direction that can be given them: if they remember that “Christ is all,” and heartily endeavour to make him *their* all, they can never perish. Their danger arises not less from their aversion to exalt the Saviour, than it does from the love of worldly and carnal lusts; yea, it is far easier to mortify any vicious habit whatever, than to bring the soul to an unfeigned acquiescence in Christ as our ALL: we are always wanting to retain some ground of self-preference, and self-complacency: but, if ever we be saved by him, we must lie in his hands as new-born infants, and be contented to be “washed, justified, and sanctified by him” alone” — — — *The drooping and doubting Christian* may also find in these words the very direction which he most of all stands in need of. Doubts and fears arise, either from a defective view of Christ’s all-sufficiency, or from an apprehension of our own want of meetness to participate his benefits: we wish to see ourselves purified in some measure, in order that we may be warranted to lay hold on the promises: whereas the Scripture teaches us, first to lay hold on the promises *as sinners*, that “by them we may” become saints, and “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit^x.” We mean not to encourage sin of any kind; God forbid: but we must go to Christ as having nothing in ourselves, that in him we may have all.]

^u 1 Cor. vi. 11.

^x 2 Cor. vii. 1.

3. For comfort—

[Doubtless, to those who determine to abide in sin, no consolation whatever can be administered, for “the wrath of God does, and ever will, abide upon them:” but to those who would forsake sin, though they be now *the very chief of sinners*, our text affords unspeakable comfort. They are not to heal themselves in part, and then to apply to the Physician, but to go to Christ just as they are, and to cast themselves entirely upon him. O that some might be encouraged to flee to him for refuge! for as he *must be ALL* in the very best of men, so he is *willing to be ALL* to the vilest of the human race: “him that goeth unto him he will in no wise cast out”— — — As for *the true believer*, the subject before us is the one ground of all his comfort: if Christ were not to be his *all*, he would absolutely despair; because he knows that “without Christ he can do nothing:” but knowing also the all-sufficiency and faithfulness of Christ, he commits himself cheerfully into his hands, “confident that he who hath begun the good work in him, will perform it to the end^y,” and “preserve him blameless to his heavenly kingdom.”]

^y Phil. i. 6.

MMCLXXXV.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SANCTIFICATION.

Col. iii. 11. *Christ is all, and in all^a.*

IN order to ascertain the true sense of any passage of Scripture, two things are to be attended to: we should mark the scope of the context, and compare the terms or phrases with similar passages of Holy Writ. By separating these canons of interpretation, we shall often overlook the true meaning of God's word, and put upon it a forced construction; whereas, if we unite them, we shall almost always find its just import.

^a The Author, in the preceding Discourse, has treated this text as commentators in general have done, in reference to our justification before God. But he apprehends on further consideration, that it refers rather to our sanctification. In either sense, the position is true, that “Christ is all;” but the latter interpretation seems more exactly to convey the mind of the Spirit in this passage. The reader, by comparing the two Discourses, will be enabled to judge for himself.

It is undeniable that the verses which precede and follow our text refer to sanctification^b; nor is there any thing which properly relates to our justification: and therefore we have a strong presumptive ground for interpreting the words of our text in reference to the new nature, which is spoken of in the verse immediately before it: nor could any thing but the peculiarity of the expression lead one for a moment to look for any other sense. But it seems that to interpret the word "Christ," as meaning the image of Christ, or the New Man, is to take a great, and almost an unwarrantable, liberty with Scripture. Nevertheless, if we compare some other passages with the text^c, we shall find that we are fully authorized to put this construction upon it, and that there is no necessity to understand it in any other way than that which the context so evidently requires.

The meaning then of the words before us is simply this. We should be daily putting off our old and corrupt nature, and be putting on a new and holy nature; because nothing else will be at all regarded by God: whatever advantages we possess, we have nothing, if we be not holy: on the other hand, whatever disadvantages we labour under, we shall suffer no loss, if we be holy: for the image of "Christ" on the soul "is all, in all" persons, and under all circumstances: where that is, God will be pleased; and where that is not, he will be eternally displeased.

In order to confirm this momentous truth, we shall shew, that, in the eyes of God, *our restoration to the Divine image* "is all in all." It is,

I. The one scope of all his plans—

^b See ver. 1—14.

^c See 2 Cor. xiii. 5. where "Christ in us" must be understood of his image, because it is that whereby we are to ascertain whether we be in the faith. See also Gal. iv. 19. where "Christ formed in us" cannot be understood of Christ *personally*, but of Christ *spiritually*, i. e. of his image. Above all, see Rom. xiii. 14. where the very metaphor which occurs in our context, is used. "Put on the new man," says our context, "for Christ," i. e. the putting on of Christ, or of the new man, "is all." And, in the passage referred to, is the very expression, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ."

What did he design in the redemption of the world at large ?

[When first he determined to rescue man from perdition, he decreed that he would “create us anew in Christ Jesus *unto good works*, in which he ordained that we should walk^d.”

The means which he used for the accomplishment of our salvation had especial respect to this end, not to save us *in* our sins, but *from* them^e.

He sent his only dear Son to take our nature, and in that nature to live, to die, to rise again. But in all this he aimed, not at our happiness merely, but our restoration to the image which we had lost^f.” This is specified in terms peculiarly strong and energetic, in order that we may not overlook this truth as if it were only of secondary importance^g.

He gave his Holy Spirit also for the same end : he gave him to humble us^h, to renew usⁱ, to mortify all our vile lusts and passions^k, to fashion us after the Divine image^l, and to perfect that image in our souls^m.]

What does he design in imparting that redemption to individuals ?

[Wherefore did he choose any of us from before the foundation of the world ? It was “that we might be holy, and without blame before him in loveⁿ.” Why has he revealed his grace in our hearts ? It was to “teach us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world^o.” If he apply his promises to our souls, or hide his face from us, it is alike “for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness^p.” Whatever be his dispensations towards us, “this is his will, even our sanctification^q ;” and this is his ultimate design in all, even to “carry on the good work he has begun^r,” to “sanctify us wholly^s,” and to “perfect that which concerneth us^t.”]

But holiness is also,

II. The one object of his regard—

^d Eph. ii. 10. ^e Matt. i. 21. Acts iii. 26.

^f Gal. i. 4. 1 Pet. i. 18, 19. and ii. 24. Tit. ii. 14.

^g Eph. v. 25—27. ^h John xvi. 8—11. ⁱ Tit. iii. 5, 6.

^k Rom. viii. 13.

^l Eph. iv. 23, 24. with 2 Cor. i. 22. A “seal” is an impress of the Divine image ; and an “earnest” is the commencement of heavenly purity and joy.

^m 2 Cor. iii. 18.

ⁿ Eph. i. 4.

^o Tit. ii. 11, 12.

^p 2 Cor. vii. 1. with Heb. xii. 10.

^q 1 Thess. iv. 3.

^r Phil. i. 6.

^s 1 Thess. v. 23.

^t Ps. cxxxviii. 8.

Nothing but that is regarded by him in this world—

[The external ordinances of religion are not only worthless, but even hateful, in his sight, if destitute of solid piety^u. On the other hand, the smallest particle of genuine goodness is not overlooked by him^x. Even the semblance of it has sometimes been rewarded by him, in order that he might shew to mankind how great a value he has for it, where it really exists^y. One single disposition is declared by him to be of great price in his sight^z. The purposes which have never been realized in act, are highly commended by him^a. And wherever he sees a person labouring to do his will, he invariably reveals to him his love in a more abundant measure^b, and communicates to him his richest blessings^c.]

Nothing but that will be regarded by him in the world to come—

[When we shall stand at the judgment-seat of Christ, the inquiry will be, not, what we have professed, but what we have done^d: and a Gentile who has served God according to the light that he enjoyed, will be preferred before the Christian, who has not made a suitable improvement of his superior advantages^e. Apparently trivial occurrences will be noticed in that day; and rewards will be dispensed, not according to the greatness and splendour of our actions, but according to their intrinsic qualities, and to the principle evinced by them^f. We must not indeed imagine that there is any *merit* in our poor services, for there is imperfection in them all; and, “if we had done all that is commanded us, we should be only unprofitable servants:” but God delights in holiness; and wherever he beholds it, he will, of his own grace and mercy, bestow upon it a proportionate reward, exalting those to the highest thrones in glory, who have made the greatest improvement of the talents committed to them^g.

There will be no distinction made, except what is grounded on the different degrees of conformity to the Divine image which the different individuals have attained. God will not respect the circumcised more than the uncircumcised, or the rich and learned more than the poor and illiterate. In all persons equally the image of Christ will be sought for; and the possession, or want of it, will determine their eternal state: “Christ will then be, as he now is, all, and in all.”]

We conclude with INQUIRING, *Who amongst you is like-minded with God?*

^u Isai. i. 11—16.

^x 1 Kings xiv. 13.

^y 1 Kings xxi. 29.

^z 1 Pet. iii. 4.

^a 1 Kings viii. 18.

^b John xiv. 23.

^c Isai. lviii. 10, 11.

^d Matt. vii. 21—23. and xxv. 31—46.

^e Rom. ii. 25—27.

^f Matt. x. 42.

^g Matt. xxv. 19—23.

1. Ye children of this world—

[How far are ye from according with God. With him, *Christ* is all; with you, *the world*. If ye may but enjoy the pleasures, the honours, the riches of the world, ye care not about the image of Christ: to be rich in faith and good works is not the object of your ambition: *that* you leave to the old, the sick, the enthusiasts. But ah! if Christ be *all*, as indeed he is, think what a vanity you are pursuing: think how poor ye will be in the day of judgment; and how you will then execrate your present ways. Be persuaded to be wise in time: and beg without delay that “Christ may be made unto you wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption^h.”]

2. Ye self-deceiving professors—

[How many are there in the Church, who will talk about Christ, and speak of him as the ground of all their hopes, while yet they are shamefully destitute of his image! Yes, grievous it is to say, that there are “many vain-talkers and deceivers” now, as well as in the apostolic age; many that are proud and passionate; many that are earthly-minded and covetous; many that are unchaste and lewd; many that are deceitful in their words, and dishonest in their dealings; many, in short, whose tempers, and dispositions, and conduct, are a disgrace to their profession. Know ye, if such there be here present, that ye are as unlike to God as Satan himself is; and that all your knowledge, all your experiences, and all your professions, will only aggravate your condemnation, if you die in your present stateⁱ. You do well to rely on Christ, and to make him your *all* in point of dependence; but know for a certainty, that, however you may pretend to trust in him, you never can be saved by him, unless you become new creatures^k: for “without holiness no man shall see the Lord^l.”]

3. Ye true believers—

[You can appeal to God that you are like-minded with him in this grand point; and that you desire as much to be saved from sin, as to be delivered from hell itself. This is a blessed evidence that ye are born of God^m. While ye are thus panting after holiness, ye have nothing to fear: your faith is soundⁿ, your hope is scriptural^o, and saving^p. Go on then from grace to grace, from strength to strength^q. Be daily

^h 1 Cor. i. 30.ⁱ Job xxxvi. 13.^k 2 Cor. v. 17.^l Heb. xii. 14.^m 1 John iii. 10.ⁿ Jam. ii. 22.^o 1 John iii. 3.^p Rom. v. 5. and viii. 24.^q 2 Pet. iii. 18.

putting off the old man with its lusts^r, and putting on the new man with all its characteristic graces^s. Be “growing up thus into Christ in all things as your living Head^t,” till you have arrived at the full measure of the stature of Christ^u :” and when you have attained a perfect meetness for the enjoyment of your God, you shall be like him, and with him for ever^x.]

^r ver. 8, 9.^s ver. 12, 13.^t Eph. iv. 15.^u Eph. iv. 13.^x 1 John iii. 2.

MMCLXXXVI.

CHRISTIAN CONSTANCY DISPLAYED.

Col. iii. 12—14. *Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.*

THE end of Christianity is, to restore man to the Divine image, in order to his ultimate restoration to the blessedness which he has forfeited and lost: nor does God ever accomplish the latter but through the medium of the former. Doubtless the Lord Jesus Christ, by his own obedience unto death, effects our reconciliation with God: *that* is *his* work, and *his alone*. But our “meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light” is the work of his Holy Spirit^a; and it is wrought in every one of “God’s elect:” for no one is “chosen to salvation but through the sanctification of the Spirit, united with, and added to, the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ^b.” Hence, in the chapter before us, the Apostle marks distinctly wherein that renovation consists: it is “a putting off of the old man, and a putting on of the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness^c.” The particular evils of the old man, which are to be put off, are enumerated in ver. 8, 9. The particular graces of the new man, which are to be put on, are stated in the words of my text: and,

^a Col. i. 12. ^b 1 Pet. i. 2. ^c ver. 9, 10. with Eph. iv. 24.

inasmuch as this transformation of the soul into the Divine image, or “the forming of Christ within us,” is that which, beyond all other marks of distinction, will operate to our final acceptance with God^d, the Apostle urges us to meet God, as it were, upon his own terms: “Put on, *therefore*,” the new man: and he urges us, by the consideration of the distinguishing grace which we ourselves have received: “Put on, *therefore*, as the elect of God, holy and beloved,” this new man. Now, the attainment of this change is what we all profess to hope for; and, therefore, it should be sought by us with all diligence, and be manifested by us in the whole of our life and conversation.

To impress this upon your minds, I will shew,

I. Wherein the Christian character consists—

If we would have a full view of this subject, we must enter into the Christian’s experience *before God*. But that would lead us beyond the proper scope of our text, which confines our attention to the Christian in his daily walk *before man*. Adhering then to our text, let us see what the Christian should be,

1. In the daily habit of his mind—

[You cannot but know, brethren, what proud, selfish creatures we are by nature; caring for nothing but our own ease, pleasure, honour, and advancement. Except in very particular cases, where relative or social ties have created a more than ordinary interest in our minds, how little do we feel for those around us; either for those with whom we have more immediate intercourse, or those who are bowed down with sorrows of any kind!

But, in opposition to these hateful dispositions, we should put on, in the place of indifference, compassion; in the place of roughness, courtesy; and in the place of pride, humility. We may conceive how a mother’s bowels would yearn over her first-born child, when writhing in agony, and perishing through want. Such “bowels of mercies should we put on” towards all who are in want or trouble of any kind; participating, at least by sympathy, the sorrows which we cannot

^d This is the meaning of “Christ is all,” *i.e.* the *image of Christ*. Compare Gal. iv. 19.

alleviate in any other way. And towards every person with whom we come in contact, whether he be a superior, an equal, or an inferior, yea, and whether he be a friend or foe, we should “put on kindness,” and exercise nothing but benevolence. As least of all, we should be ever ready to take the lowest place, “putting on humbleness of mind,” and, with unaffected simplicity, rendering ourselves the servants of all around us. This, I say, should be the daily habit of our minds; not called forth by great exertion, but operating readily, naturally, habitually, as the feelings of a mother towards her infant offspring.]

2. In his deportment towards others—

[Here, alas! we cannot but be sensible what irritability we have shewn on the slightest occasions; what displeasure, when an offence has been of any continuance; what alienation we have felt from those who differ from us in their sentiments and conduct; and what vindictiveness, when any serious injury has been sustained by us. But all of this is sadly unbecoming us as the followers of Christ, whom, by every possible consideration, we are bound to imitate and resemble. For anger, we should “put on meekness;” and “long-suffering,” in the place of retaliation or complaint. Instead of harbouring intolerance, we should “put on forbearance;” and, instead of retaining a vindictive spirit against any, we should call to mind how many and great offences Christ has forgiven us; and should gladly “mete to our fellow-creatures the measure which we ourselves have received from him.” This is the spirit which we are to manifest on all occasions; and this is to be the constant tenour of our way, in all our intercourse with mankind.]

3. In the governing principle of his life—

[Here is man’s great defect. By nature we are altogether wrapt up in *self*. *Self* is the principle that actuates us in every thing, and the end for which alone we live. Self-seeking, self-pleasing, self-interest, occupy, for the most part, our every thought, and regulate our every motion. But there is a new principle that is imparted to the Christian, and under its influence his whole life must be directed: and this is, the principle of love or charity. This is the root and essence of every other grace: it comprehends all, combines all, consolidates all. Whatever there be that enters into the composition of Christian “perfection, *this* is the bond” which unites it altogether, and forms it into one harmonious mass. It is the spirit which pervades and actuates every faculty of the soul, even as the soul directs and regulates every member of the body. The soul, in operation, causes every member to

perform its proper office; and love, presiding, will keep every Christian grace in full activity. This, therefore, we must “put on, over all, and above all” the other graces that have been mentioned; that so nothing may be wanting to the proper discharge of all our duties.]

That I may the better commend to you this state of mind, I will endeavour to point out,

II. The vast importance of it—

Notice particularly what the Apostle urges in my text: “Put on, *as the elect of God, holy and beloved*,” these several graces. *God calls for it: man expects it: consistency requires it.*

1. God calls for it—

[You are his elect. But to what has he called you? Not to salvation only, but “unto holiness^e.” Hear particularly how St. Paul states this matter: “God has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, *that we should be holy and without blame before him in love^f*.” And again: “He has predestinated us to be conformed to the image of his Son^g.” Now if, instead of cultivating these graces, we retain “the old man” in all his power and efficiency, we defeat the very object which God, supposing him to have elected us, has had in view. And will God endure that? Our blessed Lord said, “Have not I chosen you twelve; and one of you is a devil^h?” Know, then, if we continue devils, as Judas did, we shall, with him, “go to *our own placeⁱ*,” and not to the habitation of the just. We can never be “beloved” of our God, if we be not “holy.”]

2. Man expects it—

[If we profess to be “the elect of God,” man will very reasonably demand a proof of it. We may tell him of our *faith*: but he will reply, ‘Shew me your *works*. As for your faith, God alone can judge of that: but I must judge of the tree by its fruits: and, if you profess to be distinguished above your fellows by the special favour of your God, I have a right to ask, “What do ye *more than others^k*?” Have you “put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness^l?” Let me see what your tempers are in your family, and towards all around you, and especially

^e 1 Thess. iv. 7.

^f Eph. i. 4.

^g Rom. viii. 29.

^h John vi. 70.

ⁱ Acts i. 25.

^k Matt. v. 47.

^l Eph. iv. 22—24.

under circumstances of heavy trial. Tell me not of your inward experiences *before God* : I must judge by your spirit and conduct *towards man* : and, if I find you not endued with the graces of the Spirit, I can account you no better than others ; yea, rather, I must account you worse ; since, with all your high professions, you are no better than hypocrites and deceivers.']

3. Consistency requires it—

[*This is the peculiar force of my text.* When we call ourselves “the elect of God,” we *profess* to have been “renewed in the spirit of our mind :” for, if we do not profess this, the most abandoned reprobate in the universe has as much right to call himself “elect,” as we. “Are you, then, destitute of compassion? How dwelleth the love of God in you^m?” Are you proud, passionate, intolerant, unforgiving? “*Lie not against the truthⁿ* :” ye are “children of darkness, and not of light ;” “not children of God, but children of the devil^o.” To “call Christ, Lord, Lord,” without walking in his steps, is only to deceive and ruin your own souls.]

BEHOLD then, brethren,

1. The excellence of Christian principles—

[Christianity requires us to refer all good to God ; and to say, after all that we have attained, “By the grace of God I am what I am^p.” But will this tend to encourage us in sin? No ; “the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, teaches us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world^q :” and “the hope that we have in Christ will, of necessity, lead us to purify ourselves, even as He is pure^r.”]

2. The beauty of the Christian character—

[Look at a man *habited*, as my text describes, in all those lovely graces ; and “so clothed with them,” as never to be seen without them : and then tell me, whether he be not a lovely character. Is there a man in the universe that does not admire “bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearance, and forgiveness,” and all under the direction and government of “love?” I grant, that, from envy and jealousy, the world may be filled with rage against a person possessing all these graces : for so were they incensed against our blessed Lord himself, in whom these virtues existed in their utmost possible perfection : but this was on other grounds than on account of his virtues : he

^m 1 John iii. 17.

ⁿ Jam. iii. 14.

^o 1 John iii. 7—10.

^p 1 Cor. xv. 10.

^q Tit. ii. 11, 12.

^r 1 John iii. 3.

professed himself the Messiah; and *therefore* they put him to death: his tempers, and dispositions, and habits, they could not but admire. And so, at this day, the men that hate us, under the idea of "God's elect," cannot but acknowledge that the consistent Christian is, of all characters, the loveliest upon the face of the earth^s. I call upon all of you therefore, brethren, to "shew forth these virtues;" and thus to "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, by well-doing^t."]

^s 1 Pet. iii. 4.

^t 1 Pet. ii. 15.

MMCLXXXVII.

LOVE TO THE SCRIPTURES RECOMMENDED.

Col. iii. 16. *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.*

IT was declared to be one of the principal advantages which the Jews enjoyed above the heathen, that they had "the Oracles of God committed to them^a:" and we are still more highly privileged, in that we have in our hands the New-Testament Scriptures, whereby we are enabled to understand the writings of Moses and the prophets more fully than the writers themselves understood them. What part of the Christian records the Colossians could possess, we do not exactly know: we are sure that the sacred canon was not yet complete; nor were the different epistles which are come down to us, collected into one volume. It is probable enough that one or two of the Gospels might have been seen by them: and the possession of such a treasure would be a very sufficient ground for the exhortation before us. To *us* who enjoy a complete collection of all that God has ever seen fit to reveal,—at least, as much of it as is at all necessary for our edification and comfort,—the exhortation may be addressed with proportionably greater weight. To impress it the more powerfully upon your minds, we shall take occasion from it to shew you, in what light the sacred volume should be regarded, and in what manner it should be improved.

^a Rom. iii. 1, 2.

I. In what light it should be regarded—

The word which has been transmitted to us was written by different men, in different and distant ages of the world. But though it was written by men, it is indeed the word of God; because those holy men wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost^b. Indeed, the word is, properly and strictly speaking, “the word of Christ”—

[Our blessed and adorable Lord ministered to the Church not only before his incarnation, but from the very beginning of the world. It was He who preached by Noah to the antediluvian world^c. It was He who inspired all the prophets in all succeeding ages of the Church; and enabled them to testify beforehand respecting his future sufferings and glory^d. Thus was he the real Author of the Old Testament. With respect to the New Testament, whatever is revealed there must also be traced to the same source. It was Christ who taught his Apostles, and who “by his Spirit brought all things to their remembrance,” and, in a personal appearance to Saul, revealed to him the whole scheme and plan of redemption^e. What the Apostles spake in his name, they affirmed to be, not the word of man, but of God^f: and what they wrote in their epistles, they declared to be “the commandment of their Lord^g.” Hence every part of the sacred volume is justly called by the Apostle “the word of Christ.”]

In this view it ought to be regarded by us—

[Let us suppose that the Lord Jesus Christ were now to come amongst us, and to teach in our Churches, as once he did in the streets and synagogues of Judea: should we not, if we knew him to be that very Jesus, listen to him with the deepest attention? Should we not revolve in our thoughts the various subjects of his discourse, and labour to ascertain their true import? If we could suppose him now addressing us from the cross, and appealing to his sufferings as an unquestionable demonstration of his love, and an irresistible argument for our adherence to him; should we not be melted to tears? should we not be ready to exclaim, “What have we to do any more with idols?” “Other lords have had dominion over us; but by thee only will we make mention of thy name.” Or, lastly, let us suppose that we saw the heavens opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God^h: let us suppose he spake to us now, as once he did from Mount Sinai, with thunder-

^b 2 Pet. i. 21.^c 1 Pet. iii. 18—20.^d 1 Pet. i. 10, 11.^e Gal. i. 11, 12.^f 1 Thess. ii. 13.^g 1 Cor. xiv. 37.^h Acts vii. 56.

ings, and lightnings, and earthquakes, and the sound of the trumpet waxing louder and louderⁱ; should we not tremble? should we not be ready to engage, as the Israelites did, "All that the Lord hath spoken will we do, and be obedient?" Were we to hear him speaking to us in any of these ways, the word would not more certainly be *his*, than this word is which we now possess: and therefore whatever sentiments of fear or love or gratitude we should feel on account of such revelations of his will, we ought to feel in reference to that sacred volume which we have in our hands: whenever we look upon it, we should say, This is the word of Him who came down from heaven to instruct me; of Him who died upon the cross to save me; of Him who now sits enthroned in glory, and will hereafter fix my doom according to it^k.]

Let us next inquire,

II. In what manner it should be improved—

We should not merely regard it with pious veneration, but should make use of it,

1. For the furnishing of our minds—

[It is to little purpose to have the Scriptures in our houses, unless we read them diligently, and acquire a practical and experimental knowledge of them. As the tables of the law were deposited within the ark, so should the whole "word of God be hid within our hearts." It should "dwell in us;" it should dwell in us "richly:" its *precepts* should be treasured up in our minds, that we may know what the will of the Lord is: its *promises* should be precious to us, that we may be able to plead them at the throne of grace, and obtain the accomplishment of them to our own souls: nor should its *threatenings* be overlooked, but rather be considered as kind and salutary admonitions which are given us for our good.

It will be said by many, that their memory is defective, and that they cannot retain the things which they read or hear: but if we made a practice of selecting daily some short portion of Scripture for our meditation throughout the day, the most ignorant amongst us would soon attain a knowledge which at present appears far beyond his reach.]

2. For the regulating of our conduct—

[Speculative knowledge, for the most part, administers only to pride and contention. That which alone is valuable to the Christian is practical. The Scriptures are designed to lead him to such wisdom and discretion as will be in vain

ⁱ Heb. xii. 18, 19.

^k John xii. 48.

sought for from any other source. Indeed "*all* wisdom" is to be "drawn from these wells of salvation." The person whose mind is cast into the mould of the Scripture, will view every thing as God views it: he will have the same practical judgment as God himself has. "Good and evil, light and darkness" will not be confounded in his mind, as they are in the minds of ungodly men: he will distinguish them with ease, except in cases that are very obscure and complicated: by means of the spiritual discernment which he has obtained, he will be able to judge of the conduct of others, whilst they are not able to appreciate his^l: and as far as his actions are regulated by his principles, he will be a light to all around him; and they shall be constrained to "acknowledge that God is with them of a truth." Indeed it is for this end that God sets up a light in his people's souls; "not that it may be put under a bushel, but that it may be set on a candlestick, and give light to all that are in the house;" and that the person possessing it may be able to say to all around him, "Whatsoever ye have seen and heard in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you."]

That we may ENFORCE the exhortation in our text, we would remind you, that a love to the Scriptures is,

1. An inseparable attendant on true piety—

[Look at the most distinguished saints, and see how they regarded the inspired records. Job esteemed the words of God's mouth more than his necessary food^m: Jeremiah found them the "joy and rejoicing of his heartⁿ:" and to David they were "sweeter than honey and the honey-comb^o." Let not us then think that we have any title to be classed with those holy men, if we do not resemble them in this particular — — —]

2. A necessary means of advancement in every part of the divine life—

[Have we been only just quickened from the dead? we cannot but love that which has been the means of giving us life^p. Are we as new-born babes? we must of necessity "desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby^q." Are we arrived at the strength and stature of youth? "that word must abide within us, in order that we may be able to overcome" the great adversary of our souls^r. In a word, whatever state we be in, it is "by them that we are to be furnished for every good word and work^s."]]

^l 1 Cor. ii. 14, 15.

^m Job xxiii. 12.

ⁿ Jer. xv. 16.

^o Ps. xix. 10.

^p Ps. cxix. 93.

^q 1 Pet. ii. 2.

^r 1 John ii. 14.

^s 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

MMCLXXXVIII.

DOING ALL IN THE NAME OF CHRIST.

Col. iii. 17. *Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.*

SUPPOSING the existence of one Supreme Being to be acknowledged, our obvious duty towards him must be, to exercise such a dependence on him, as shall evince a consciousness, that “in him we live, and move, and have our being^a.” This being what, for distinction’s sake, I will call natural religion, we may see what must, of necessity, be required of us under the Christian dispensation. By the Gospel we are informed, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Creator and Governor of the universe; and, consequently, must be entitled to all that regard which, as Theists, we pay to the Supreme Being. But He is further revealed to us as the Redeemer of the world; and, consequently, as standing in a still nearer relation to us, as our vital Head; from whom we derive all supplies of grace and peace, and to whom we must ascribe all the blessings which we enjoy, whether in time or in eternity. What, then, is evangelical religion? It is not an assent to certain principles, however accurate those principles may be: nor is it a practice of certain duties, however commendable those duties may be. It is a habit of mind, by means of which Christ’s universal agency is acknowledged, and the whole soul goes forth to him; receiving every thing from his fulness, and improving every thing for his glory.

To unfold this more clearly, I will endeavour to shew, what, under the Gospel dispensation, should be the habit of our minds,

I. In all that we do for God—

In my text, we are told to do every thing “*in the name of Jesus Christ.*” Now, by this expression, I understand that we should do every thing,

^a Acts xvii. 28.

1. From respect to his authority—

[St. Paul says, “We command you, *in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly^b.” It was by the authority of Christ that he issued that command; and from a respect to that authority was that command to be obeyed. In like manner must we have respect to Christ in every thing that we do: for he has said, “Then are ye my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.” It must be a matter of indifference to us what *man* may enjoin, unless it have the sanction of our blessed Lord’s authority also. We must always ask ourselves, What does the Lord Jesus Christ require of me? *That* I will do, at all events, and under all circumstances. If it be approved of man, I will do it, not so much to please man, as to please the Lord: and if it be disapproved by man, I shall still do it, because it will please my Lord: nor will I be diverted from the path of duty, though the whole world should combine to oppose my progress. My Lord’s will being clearly ascertained, I shall need nothing to encourage my exertions, nor will I suffer any thing to obstruct them.]

2. From love to his name—

[We read of “receiving a child *in Christ’s name*,” and of “giving a cup of water *in his name*”^c: that must import that we do it from love to Christ. And this should be the one spring of all our actions: “The love of Christ should constrain us^d.” It is not necessary that there should be in our minds, on all occasions, a long train of argumentation to call forth this principle: a mother needs not such a process to call forth her love to her infant offspring: if an occasion fall for the exercise of that principle, it is ready for action at all times, and at a moment’s notice. And so should it be with us, towards our Lord Jesus Christ: there should be in us such a deep and abiding sense of our obligations to him, that, in every thing we say, and in every thing we do, we should desire to please him.]

3. In dependence on his grace—

[The Prophet Micah says, “All people will walk every one *in the name of his god*; and we will walk *in the name of the Lord our God* for ever and ever;” that is, in an entire dependence upon him. Now, to whom must we look for *direction* in all our ways, but to the Lord Jesus Christ, who has engaged, as our Shepherd, to go before us^e, and who has told us in all things to follow his steps^f?” And on whom

^b 2 Thess. iii. 6.

^c Mark ix. 37, 41.

^d 2 Cor. v. 14.

^e John x. 4.

^f 1 Pet. ii. 21.

shall we rely for *assistance* in our difficulties, but on him who has directed us to be “strong in the Lord^g,” and assured us that “through his strength we shall do all things^h?” And through whom can we hope for *acceptance*, but through Him, our Mediator and all-prevailing Intercessorⁱ ?]

4. For the advancement of his glory—

[When Peter and John had healed a man that had been lame from his mother’s womb, the spectators were ready to ascribe the miracle either to “the power or holiness of those” who had wrought it: but the Apostles instantly gave the glory to the Lord Jesus Christ, *in whose name*, and by whose power alone, it had been wrought: “*His name, through faith in his name*, hath made this man strong, whom you see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all^k.” Thus, whatever it be that we either say or do, we must consult his glory, and labour to advance it. Nothing is too insignificant for us to attend to in this view: “Whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we must do all to the glory of God^l.” If it be thought that it would be presumption to suppose that any thing we can do can by any means advance his glory, we quite mistake: for, in his last intercessory prayer, he said, “All mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them^m.”]

The same habit of mind must be cultivated, also,

II. In all that God does for us—

There may be many occurrences which, to flesh and blood, are painful: yet, in them must we see nothing but an occasion of praise and thanksgiving. Job blessed God as well for taking away his property as for bestowing itⁿ. And thus must we also “in every thing give thanks,” knowing that “this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning us^o.”

We, in all circumstances, have occasion to praise our God—

[Those things which have the most painful aspect are yet in reality the fruits of love: for “whom God loveth, he chasteneth; and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth^p.” Indeed, the beneficial tendency of our afflictions is often as

^g Eph. vi. 10.

^h 2 Cor. xii. 9. Phil. iv. 13.

ⁱ Eph. iii. 18. 1 John ii. 1, 2.

^k Acts iii. 6, 16.

^l 1 Cor. x. 31.

^m John xvii. 10.

ⁿ Job i. 21.

^o 1 Thess. v. 8.

^p Heb. xii. 6.

clear and visible as if it were pointed out to us by a voice from heaven. For who does not see how trials wean us from the world, and purify us from our dross? We are told, and we find it true, that “tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, even a hope that maketh not ashamed^q.” But, independent of this, so great are the blessings of redemption, that they ought to swallow up, as it were, every other consideration; and to fill our souls with unutterable joy and gratitude, even in the midst of all the troubles that either men or devils can inflict upon us. In the first chapter of this epistle, the Apostle puts this in a most striking point of view. He supposes the Colossians to be oppressed with heavy and long-continued afflictions: and “he prays for them,” that they may be “strengthened with all might, according to God’s glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering, with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the Father, who hath made them meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; who hath delivered them from the power of darkness; and hath translated them into the kingdom of his dear Son, in whom they had redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins^r.” Must they under their trials be content with exercising “patience?” no: or “long-suffering?” no: they must be filled with “joyfulness;” and be so borne up by a sense of God’s mercy, and by the wonders of redeeming love, as to have not a word to utter but in a way of praise and thanksgiving. This then, beloved, is to be the frame of your minds at all times; as it was of Paul and Silas, when in the prison and in the stocks “they sang praises to God at midnight^s.”]

In doing it, however, we must still have respect to the Lord Jesus Christ for the acceptance of our very best services—

[Continually is this inculcated in the Scriptures of truth. “We must give thanks *always for all things* unto God and the Father *in the name of* our Lord Jesus Christ^t.” Praise is “a sacrifice which must be offered” on him as our altar; and “be presented by him” as our great High Priest, even as the animals were under the Jewish law^u; and it is therefore called “the calves of our lips^x :” nor can any sacrifice, however holy, be “acceptable to God, but as offered to him through Jesus Christ^y.” This is particularly to be borne in mind at all times. We must “never sacrifice unto our own net, or burn incense to our own drag^z,” but do on earth as they are doing in heaven.

^q Rom. v. 3—5.^r Col. i. 11—14.^s Acts xvi. 25.^t Eph. v. 20.^u Heb. xiii. 15.^x Hos. xiv. 2.^y 1 Pet. ii. 5.^z Hab. i. 16.

Not a voice is heard in heaven which does not give glory to God and to the Lamb: nor on earth should a soul be found that does not say, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise."]

Let me now OBSERVE,

1. If this be religion, how little is there of true religion upon earth!

[Where do you find men of the character above described? How few are there, how very few, in whom this is found to be the prevailing habit of their minds! An attention to doctrines is frequent; nor is regard for moral duties uncommon: but such views of Christ, such respect to his authority, such love to his name, such dependence on his grace, such zeal for his glory, and, withal, such an overwhelming sense of his love as swallows up every other feeling; where are these found? In how very small a measure are they possessed by the very best amongst us! and how far are the generality from possessing them at all! Yet it is by this standard that all Christian experience must be tried. My dear brethren, get your minds rightly instructed in this matter; and then will you be able to form a right judgment, both of your own state and of every thing around you.]

2. If this be true religion, how happy a man is the true Christian!

[Doubtless the Christian must be conscious of innumerable defects, and must find cause in himself for the deepest humiliation. But, in proportion as he has attained this experience, tell me whether he be not happy? tell me whether he be not a far happier man than the possession of the whole world could make him? I know that an ignorant ungodly world will deride this as enthusiasm: but the passage which I before cited, in reference to natural religion, is amply sufficient to shew that this experience is most rational, and indispensable to the Christian character. What are the feelings of one who, in the daily habit of his mind, "lives, and moves, and has his being in God?" Precisely such are the Christian's feelings towards the Lord Jesus Christ, only elevated by a sense of redeeming love. "Believe ye then in Christ;" and "abide in him" by the exercise of faith and love: and let him be "your life:" yea, "live altogether by faith in Him who has loved you, and given himself for you." Then will you "rejoice in him even now, with a joy that is unspeakable and glorified," and soon be partakers of "all the fulness of joy at God's right hand for evermore."]

MMCLXXXIX.

THE RELATIVE DUTIES EXPLAINED.

Col. iii. 18.—iv. 1. *Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged. Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God: and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons. Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.*

IT is often a matter of complaint with some, that many who have been ordained to preach the Gospel leave the great and mysterious doctrines of the Gospel on the back ground, and bring forward little else than dry morality. But, whatever ground there may be for that complaint, it may be well to inquire, Whether there be not too much reason to complain of another class, who pay such exclusive attention to the doctrines, as almost entirely to overlook the duties, of the Gospel? Amongst some it would be almost thought superfluous, and even wrong, to devote an entire discourse to the subject of moral duties; since, according to their views, the discharge of them may well be left to the simple operation of faith, without any distinct statement of them from the teachers of Christianity. But so thought not the Apostle Paul. On the contrary, in those two epistles (to the Ephesians, and Colossians) in which he enters most deeply into the mysteries of Christianity, he enlarges most fully on the relative duties. We are persuaded that a similar plan ought to be adopted by every minister of Christ. We should have no exclusive preference for doctrines or duties, but should put each in their place, and bring them both forward in their proper

season. Convinced of this, we enter with great pleasure on the consideration of our relative duties ; that is, of the duties,

I. Of husbands and wives—

It is worthy of observation, that, not in this place only, but in all other places where the Apostles speak of the relative duties, they mention those of the inferior first. The reason of this seems to be, that the duties of the inferior arise solely from the command of God, and are totally independent of the conduct of the superior ; so that no neglect of duty on the one part can justify any neglect of it on the other. Agreeably therefore to the Apostolic plan, we shall notice the duty,

1. Of wives—

[To you are assigned obedience and subjection ; partly, because you were created after man, and for the sake of man ; and partly because you were first in the transgression, and were the means of bringing ruin upon man and upon all his posterity^a. The extent to which obedience to your husband is required of you is indeed exceeding great : it reaches to every thing that is not contrary to the will of God : it is, if I may so speak, co-extensive with the obedience which the Church owes to the Lord Jesus Christ ; and your obedience is due to your husband, as to the Lord himself. I am aware that this expression is very strong ; but I conceive it is not at all stronger than the declarations of St. Paul. True, in the text it is only said, “Submit yourselves, *as it is fit* in the Lord :” but in the Epistle to the Ephesians he draws the very parallel that I have drawn, and shews that your duty to your husband corresponds exactly with the Church’s duty to the Lord Jesus Christ : “Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, *as unto the Lord* : for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the Church : and he is the Saviour of the body. Therefore, *as* the Church is subject unto Christ, *so* let the wives be to their own husbands *in every thing*^b.” (Of course, this will be understood of obedience only, and not of dependence ; for that were absurd and impious in the extreme.) In the whole of this obedience, she must feel that it is due to him by God’s special appointment : that he is her head, and her lord, whom she is bound, not only to obey,

^a 1 Tim. ii. 11—14. with Gen. iii. 16.

^b Eph. v. 22—24.

but to obey with "reverence^c," "even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord^d."

This may be thought to sound harsh by those who are not accustomed to consider what the Scripture speaks on this subject: but it will not be thought so, if we contemplate what God has required,]

2. Of husbands—

[Your duty, is to "love your wives," and never on any occasion to entertain an unkind feeling towards them. A proud, haughty, imperious carriage towards them is most offensive to God, who will regard every harsh, bitter, or contemptuous expression towards them as an abuse of your authority and a violation of his commands. Though he has constituted you lords, he has not authorized you to be tyrants; but requires you to be precisely such lords over your wives, as Christ is over his Church. You are to govern, it is true; but you are to govern only for the good of the wife: you are to seek only, and at all times, her best interests, and to promote to the utmost of your power her real happiness. You must not require any thing unreasonable at her hands, nor ever fail to recompense with testimonies of your love the efforts which she makes to please you. Nor must you merely endeavour to render her happy, but you must be ready to make great sacrifices for this end. What the Lord Jesus Christ has done for his Church, is set forth as the proper model and pattern of your duty towards your wife: "*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and GAVE HIMSELF FOR IT.*" O! what an example is here! Methinks, no wife would complain of the obedience that is required of her, if the authority of her husband were exercised in such a way as this: on the contrary, obedience on her part would be her chief delight. Know then, ye husbands, that this is the duty assigned to you: if your wives are to be obedient, as the Church is to Christ, ye also on your part are to be loving, even as Christ is to the Church. "Your wives should be to you as your own flesh. Now no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord does the Church^e:" and precisely in the same way should you exercise all imaginable tenderness towards your wives, and be as careful of paining them as you would be of suffering any thing to wound the apple of your eye.]

Next to the duties of husbands and wives will naturally follow those,

II. Of parents and children—

^c Eph. v. 33. ^d 1 Pet. iii. 1, 5, 6. ^e Eph. v. 28, 29, 33.

Here again we are called, in the first place, to notice those of the inferior :

1. Of children—

[Obedience is your duty also: nor is there any limit to the exercise of this duty, except where you are required to violate a command of God. Reason indeed is sufficient to teach you this: for your own ignorance and inexperience must of necessity direct you to look up to your parents for instruction and guidance. But revelation teaches you to regard the authority of your parents as God's authority, and to consider obedience to *them* as obedience to *him*. In fulfilling the commands of parents, there should be no reluctance: on the contrary, to please, and serve, and honour his parents should be the desire and delight of every child. He should have no wish to shake off their yoke; no desire to act independently of them. Nor let this be thought hard: for God has annexed a special promise to the fulfilment of this duty: the command relating to it is said to be "the first commandment with promise^f;" and it is generally to be observed, that the blessing of God does rest in a more especial manner, throughout the whole of their lives, on those who have honoured and obeyed their earthly parents. This may be accounted for on natural principles; for the dispositions which are exercised in filial obedience argue a degree of self-government, which will go far to render a man both amiable and prosperous in every situation and condition of life. But besides this, the blessing of God will assuredly rest on such characters; and He, as the universal Parent, will recompense into their bosom their compliance with this command.]

2. Of parents—

[Both in the text, and in the parallel passage in the Epistle to the Ephesians, there is a restraint laid on parents with regard to the exercise of their authority: it is not to be attended with harshness or severity, "lest they provoke their children to anger, and discourage them" from attempting to fulfil their duty, under the idea, that, whatever efforts they may use to please their parents, it will be a hopeless task. Parents have much to answer for, when they produce such an effect as this on their children's minds. If on the one hand it be said, that "there is much folly in the heart of a child, and that the rod of correction must drive it out," it must be remembered, on the other hand, that the mind of a child may soon be cast down, and that we may by harsh restrictions and undue severity augment that very rebellion which we endea-

^f Eph. vi. 1—3.

your to subdue. There can be no doubt but that many parents harden their children's hearts against their authority in the first instance, and ultimately against the authority of God himself, purely by the tyranny which they exercise, and by the continual irritations which they occasion^g: and in the last day they will be found, in too many instances, the prime movers, and the real causes of their children's eternal ruin. Fathers, be upon your guard respecting this; and instead of thus driving your children to despondency, endeavour to bring them up in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord^h." See in what way God dealeth with his children, how he bears with their infirmities, and consults their best interestsⁱ: so should you do^k, and, like Abraham of old, be solicitous only for their eternal welfare^l.]

There is yet one other relation specified in the text, namely, that,

III. Of masters and servants—

It has pleased God that there should be different ranks and orders of society, and that to each should be assigned appropriate duties. We notice those,

1. Of servants—

[Your rank in society is ordered of the Lord: nor, when you hear in what light you are viewed by him, will you see any reason to repine at it. By virtue of your office you are required to "obey those who are your masters according to the flesh:" and to obey them cheerfully too, and without reserve. Nor in the discharge of this duty are you to act in the absence of your master any otherwise than you would in his immediate presence: you are to render obedience "in singleness of heart, *as unto Christ*; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but *as the servants of Christ*, doing the will of God from the heart^m." What an elevated view does this give of your situation and employments! You appear to be servants of *men*: and so indeed you are: but you are servants of *the Lord Jesus Christ*: and it is your privilege to consider yourselves as living in *his* service, as much as if he were to come down to sojourn again on earth, and to admit you into the number of his domestics. Whatever your particular office be, you are privileged, so to speak, as altogether to forget your servitude to man, and to consider yourselves as performing the

^g That is an humiliating view which the Apostle gives of parents, but, alas! how true in too many instances! Heb. xii. 10.

^h Eph. vi. 4.

ⁱ Ps. ciii. 8—13.

^k 1 Thess. ii. 11.

^l Gen. xviii. 19.

^m Eph. vi. 5, 6.

office of angels in the service of your God and Saviour. It is your privilege also to expect your wages from *him*. What you receive from man, is for your body only: but you shall have wages for your soul also, even “the reward of an eternal inheritanceⁿ.” This is represented as the state even of *slaves*, and of those who were called to serve Jewish or Heathen masters: how much more then is it the happy state of you who live in Christian families, and especially where God in Christ Jesus is loved and feared! Yes, “whether ye be bond or free, your Master, your work, your wages are the same^o.” Act then agreeably to this exalted view of your station. Even though you should have “froward and unkind masters,” still act the same: and, if your work is thereby rendered the more difficult, your reward shall be proportionably advanced^p.]

2. Of masters—

[As your servants are to put you in the place of Christ, so are you to be as in the place of Christ to them: and exactly such a master as he, if in your place, would be, such are ye to be to those who are under your command. Would he never be unreasonable in his expectations or commands? So neither are ye to be. Would he be kind and indulgent? So must ye be. Would he delight to make his servants happy; and would he consult in all things their eternal welfare? So are you to act, “*doing in your station the same thing to them*,” as they in theirs are required to do to you^q. Especially must you “forbear all threatening” words or looks; “remembering that you also have a Master in heaven, with whom there is no respect of persons,” and who, as their avenger, will call you to an account for all acts of unkindness or oppression towards the meanest of mankind. In a word, see how your God directs and governs you; and let him be your model for your government of those whom he has graciously committed to your care.]

We may SEE here,

1. The extent and excellence of true religion—

[Religion enters into every situation and relation of life. It finds the whole world disordered like a body, every joint of which from head to foot is dislocated: but by its operation on the hearts of men it sets every joint in its place, and diffuses through the whole a divine unction, whereby every joint is set at liberty, and performs with ease its proper functions. Those in a higher and more honourable station despise not those

ⁿ See the text.

^p 1 Pet. ii. 18—20.

^o Eph. vi. 8.

^q Eph. vi. 9.

which are lower and less honourable; neither are they envied by them: but each occupies with content and satisfaction the place assigned it by its Maker, and finds its own happiness in contributing, according to its ability, to the good of the whole. If it be said, that these effects are not visible in the world, even amongst those who profess religion; I answer, that this only shews how little there is of true religion in the world. The first ages of the Church display in all its beauty the native tendency of Christianity: and, if the same effects are not alike visible now, it is not owing to any want of efficiency in religion itself, but to the low state of religion in the world. In proportion as vital godliness prevails, it does, and ever must, manifest its practical influence upon the heart and life.]

2. The importance of studying the character of Christ—

[Christ ought to be well known to us in his work and offices as the Saviour of the world. But we must not confine our attention to his mediatorial work: we must also contemplate him as an example which we are to follow in every part of our conduct both towards God and man. Behold him as a son and a servant; what an entire devotion was there in him to his Father's will! It was his meat and drink to do it. View him also as the Husband and Lord of his Church; what inconceivable love and kindness does he exercise towards her at all times, notwithstanding her innumerable defects! Let us then study his character; and whether we move in the higher or inferior relation, let it be the one aim of our lives to walk in his steps, and to follow his example.]

3. The way in which to judge of our spiritual attainments—

[Religion is a practical thing, and is intended, as we have shewn, to make us fill to advantage every relation in life. Now I grant that there are many who discharge in a most commendable manner their relative duties, whilst yet they have no regard for God in their hearts. Consequently, I cannot exactly say, that the fulfilment of relative duties will stamp you as religious characters: but this I must say, that the not discharging of these aright will prove to demonstration, either that "your religion is altogether vain," or that it is at a very low ebb indeed. But supposing that there be no manifest neglect of these duties, I would ask, How much is there of *God* in them? Is the authority which you either obey or exercise, regarded as *God's*? Is his will considered as the rule of all that you do, and his glory as the end? Here is the point to be inquired into: it is this which makes your actions pleasing and acceptable to him: and I may add, that it is this

which will make obedience easy and delightful to yourselves. Habituate yourselves then to realize the thought, that it is Christ whom you serve, or in whose place you stand whilst others are serving you. So shall your whole deportment become exquisitely pure, and holy, and refined; and you will “adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.”]

MMCXC.

THE CHARACTER AND AIM OF A CHRISTIAN MINISTER.

Col. iv. 12. *Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.*

LOVE is the essence of the Christian religion. The heathens themselves noticed the fervour of the love which subsisted among the first Christians. Ministers in particular feel a distinguished regard for those to whom they have been signally useful^a. Epaphras is set forth as a most eminent pattern of affection and zeal.

I. The office he sustained—

Epaphras was perhaps the same with Epaphroditus. He was of Colosse, and perhaps the founder of the Church established there; he sustained the most honourable of all offices, being “a servant of Christ.” This office every Christian may be said to bear, but ministers bear it in a higher and more exalted sense: They are,

1. His stewards—

[A steward has the care and management of the family committed to him: so Christ’s ministers have the mysteries of the Gospel committed to them^b. They are to dispense these mysteries to men^c: hence we are taught to consider them expressly in this view^d.]

2. His messengers—

[They are ambassadors from the court of heaven^e: they deliver to men his messages of grace and mercy: they negotiate, as it were, a peace between God and man.]

^a 1 Thess. ii. 7, 8.

^b 2 Cor. iv. 7.

^c Luke xii. 42.

^d 1 Cor. iv. 1.

^e 2 Cor. v. 19, 20.

3. His representatives—

[They stand in his stead^f; the word they speak is not theirs, but his^g. The reception or rejection of them will be deemed a reception or rejection of Christ himself^h.]

4. His glory—

[They are the instruments whereby he is known and glorified: hence they are expressly called “the glory of Christⁱ.”]

In this office he acted worthy of the trust reposed in him.

II. The love he manifested—

Love will invariably manifest itself in acts of kindness towards those who are the objects of it. A minister's love will shew itself most towards the souls of men; but none can do good to souls unless God himself vouchsafe his blessing^k: hence Epaphras made application to God in prayer.

He did this fervently—

[It is said of Jacob that he “wrestled” with God all night in prayer^l. Thus did Epaphras on behalf of the Christians at Colosse^m. How desirable is it that every minister should be so occupied !]

He did it constantly—

[He was not satisfied with preaching to them, or praying with them: he remembered them “always” in his secret prayers before Godⁿ; nor did his absence from them diminish his concern for their welfare. This was the most unequivocal testimony of his affection that he could possibly give them^o.]

Nor could he rest satisfied, while his people had a sin to be forgiven, or a want to be supplied.

III. The end he aimed at—

He desired that his Christian friends might be Israelites indeed; no doubt he had exerted himself much and often to make them so. He sought the same blessed end in all his prayers for them:

^f 2 Cor. v. 20.

^g 1 Thess. ii. 13.

^h 1 Thess. iv. 8.

ⁱ 2 Cor. viii. 23.

^k 1 Cor. iii. 7.

^l Compare Gen. xxxii. 24, 28. with Hos. xii. 4.

^m This is implied in the term ἀγωνιζόμενος.

ⁿ 1 Thess. iii. 10. with Isai. lxii. 7.

^o It is easier to preach to men *ten* hours, than to pray for them *one*.

1. That they might have no secret reserves in their obedience—

[He well knew that one sin indulged would destroy the soul^p: he was aware that nothing but the most unreserved dedication of ourselves to God's service would be of any avail^q: he therefore prayed that they might do "all" the will of God.]

2. That they might attain the highest degrees of holiness—

[There is no absolute perfection or completeness in the creature; but there are high degrees of holiness to which the upright may attain^r. He longed that they might be as eminent as possible^s.]

3. That they might be steadfast to the end—

[Many "endure only for a season, and in a time of temptation fall away;" but the apostatizing of persons who have been hopeful, is death, as it were, to a faithful minister of Christ^t. He knew that there were many seeking to turn them from the faith^u: he therefore sought to have them so established that they might "stand."]

We may OBSERVE from hence,

1. What should be the standard of a minister's preaching—

[Faithful ministers are often thought too strict and severe; but if they should desire such perfection for their people, they should labour also to promote it by their preaching. If they should lower the standard of men's duty, they would betray and murder the souls committed to them. Let not any then condemn the strictness or severity of what they hear, unless it exceed the Scripture standard.]

2. What should be the measure of the people's practice—

[There is no attainment with which we should be satisfied, while there remains any thing to be attained. What ministers should desire for us, we ought to desire and aim at for ourselves. Whatever then we may have attained, let us forget what is behind, and press forward toward that which is before.]

^p Jer. xlviii. 10.

^q Ps. cxix. 6.

^r Τέλειοι καὶ πεπληρωμένοι imply, that he wished them not to continue babes, but to arrive at a state of manhood; and not to be satisfied with a scanty measure of grace and knowledge, but to be "filled with all the fulness of God."

^s 1 Thess. v. 23.

^t 1 Thess. iii. 8.

^u Col. ii. 8.

1 THESSALONIANS.

MMCXCI.

TRUE PIETY DESCRIBED.

1 Thess. i. 2—4. *We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.*

THIS epistle, though not placed first in the sacred canon, is generally supposed to have been the first in point of time: and in point of tenderness and affection, it is certainly inferior to none. The Church at Thessalonica was subjected to heavy trials. In their first reception of the word, they sustained grievous opposition^a; and, in their subsequent profession of it, they endured a great fight of afflictions, being no less cruelly persecuted by their own countrymen than the Apostles were by the Jews^b. From them St. Paul had been driven by the fury of his blood-thirsty enemies^c, who had followed him even to Beræa with the most relentless animosity^d. No wonder therefore that he felt extremely anxious for his new converts, under a situation of such peril. Gladly would he have returned to them again and again: but his watchful and malicious adversaries would not suffer it^e. Hence his anxiety for them became exteme; so that he could no longer endure

^a ver. 6.

^b 1 Thess. ii. 14.

^c Acts xvii. 5—10.

^d Acts xvii. 13, 14. ^e 1 Thess. ii. 18.

the suspense he was in concerning them. The presence of Timothy with him at Athens was of great importance: yet on the whole he thought it better to be left at Athens alone, that, by sending Timothy to them, he might gain certain information of their state, and promote their establishment in the faith^f. After Timothy's return to him, he wrote them this epistle. It is an epistle admirably calculated to impress the minds of all who read it, whether ministers or people, and to shew them what ardent affection should subsist between all who stand in that relation towards each other. In the commencement of it we see how ready he was to acknowledge and commend what was good in them: and herein he particularly instructs us how to minister with effect. Though doubtless it is the duty of every minister to reprove and correct what he sees amiss in his people, his chief delight should be to comfort the feeble-minded, to support the weak, and to build up all in their most holy faith. The object he should continually aim at should be, to be "a helper of their joy."

In discoursing on the words which we have just read, we shall consider,

I. The graces which he had seen in them—

The great leading graces of Christianity are, "faith, hope, and charity." On these all other graces essentially depend; so that where these are, there will all others most assuredly be found. But of all these graces there are counterfeits: there is "a faith that is dead:" there is "a love, which is" little else than "dissimulation:" and there is "a hope of the hypocrite that perisheth." Such however were not the graces which had been exercised among them: in them he had seen,

1. An active faith—

[True faith is active: it brings to the Christian's view the Lord Jesus Christ, as having in him a fulness of all imaginable blessings treasured up for the use of the Church; just as the

^f 1 Thess. iii. 1, 2, 5.

vine has in its root and trunk that sap, of which all the branches partake, and by which they are nourished^g—— Faith, moreover, brings him to Christ for daily supplies of those blessings which his various necessities require^h—— And having received communications of grace according to his necessities, he is stirred up by it to improve them to the glory of his Redeemer's name—— In a word, whatever the Christian has to do for God, he does it through the operation of this principle; by which, and by which alone, he overcomes the worldⁱ, and purifies his heart^k. This faith he had seen in his Thessalonian converts: yea, so eminently had it shone forth in them, that they were celebrated for it in almost every Church throughout all the Roman empire, and were held forth as patterns and ensamples of it to all the Christian world^l!]

2. A laborious love—

[Love is that fruit by which, above all, the truth and reality of faith will be discerned^m. It is by this, above all, that we can assure ourselvesⁿ, or be known to others^o, as faithful followers of Christ. If we have it not, all else that we can have is of no value^p. But love is a laborious grace: it is always seeking for something which it may *do*, either for God or man. It cannot endure to be idle. Whether it can do little or much, it delights to be doing what it can^q. Nor is it diverted from its pursuit by slight obstacles: no; like the water obstructed by the dam, it will overcome them; and will evince its strength and ardour, in proportion to the difficulties that impede its exercise. Love is a self-denying grace: and where it exists in due measure, it will prompt a man not only to sacrifice ease and interest, but even to lay down his life itself for the brethren^r. This grace was so conspicuous in the Thessalonian converts, that St. Paul judged it quite unnecessary to write to them on the subject: they were so taught by God himself respecting all its duties and offices, that he could add nothing to them, but only exhort them to abound more and more in the conduct which they had already pursued^s.]

3. A patient hope—

[Hope is the offspring of faith and love, or at least of that faith which worketh by love. It is here called “hope in our Lord Jesus Christ;” because “in him all the promises of

^g Col. i. 19. Eph. i. 22, 23. John xv. 5.

ⁱ 1 John v. 4.

^k Acts xv. 9.

^m Gal. v. 6.

ⁿ 1 John iii. 14.

^p 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

^q Mark xiv. 8.

^s 1 Thess. iv. 9, 10.

^h John i. 16.

^l ver. 7, 8.

^o John xiii. 35.

^r 1 John iii. 16.

God are yea, and amen.” It is a patient grace, leading us to expect all that God has promised, however long we may have to wait for it^t; and to fulfil all that God has required, to the utmost possible extent^u; and to suffer all that God has ordained us to suffer, in hope of a final recompence^x; and, finally, to continue in a constant course of well-doing, even to the end^y. Such was the hope which the Thessalonians had maintained; and in which they had greatly rejoiced, even in the midst of all their afflictions^z.]

From considering the graces of these eminent Christians, we proceed to notice,

II. The effects produced by them in his own mind—

They excited in the Apostle’s breast,

1. A lively interest in their welfare—

[A person less connected with them than he, could not but have admired such excellencies: but he was their father: he had begotten them in the Gospel^a: and therefore he might well boast of them, as “his glory, and joy^b.” Accordingly we find that, “whenever he came into the presence of his God and Father^c,” he both gave thanks for them, and prayed for their still greater advancement in every thing that was good. Most exalted was the joy which he felt on their account^d. When he saw the transcendent eminence of their attainments, he quite forgot all his own afflictions^e: the sight inspired new life and vigour into him^f: and he felt in himself a recompence, which richly repaid all that he had done and suffered for their sake.

This shews what are the views and feelings of every faithful minister, when he sees his people adorning by their conduct the Gospel of Christ. Verily, as St. John says, “they have no greater joy than to see their children walk in truth^g.” This comforts them in all their approaches to the throne of grace: this fills them with praises and thanksgivings to God. That so great an honour should be conferred on themselves—that such advantages should be imparted to their perishing fellow-creatures—and that such glory should be brought to God by their means—is to them a subject of almost stupifying amazement, and of overwhelming gratitude. And whilst they render thanks to God for these things, they pour out their hearts before him in

^t Rom. viii. 25.

^u 1 John iii. 3.

^x Heb. x. 34.

^y Rom. ii. 7.

^z ver. 6.

^a 1 Thess. ii. 13.

^b 1 Thess. ii. 20.

^c We connect the close of ver. 3. with the word “remembering.”

^d 1 Thess. iii. 9.

^e 1 Thess. iii. 6, 7.

^f 1 Thess. iii. 8.

^g 3 John, ver. 4.

prayers and supplications in their behalf. In a word, these things form a bond of union between a minister and his people, such as exists not in the whole world besides.]

2. An assured confidence in their state—

[When he beheld these fruits produced by his converts, he “had no doubt of their election of God:” the graces they exercised were manifestly wrought in them by the power of God, who had wrought thus upon them in consequence of his own purpose which from all eternity he had purposed in himself^h.

The same blessed assurance we also may entertain, wherever the same ground for it exists. Assurance, so founded, can never be productive of any bad effect. It is only when persons pretend to be assured of their election on other grounds, that any evil can arise from it. If, for instance, a person founded such a conceit on a dream, or vision, or strong impression on his own mind, then we would be among the first to bear testimony against him, as a wild enthusiast, and a self-deluding impostor. Against such a delusion we readily acknowledge that no terms of reprobation are too severe. But when such fruits as those which the Thessalonian converts produced are visible in any, then may we indulge the pleasing thought respecting them, as they also may respecting themselves, that “God loved them with an everlasting love, and therefore with loving-kindness hath he drawn themⁱ.” Only we may observe, that this assurance is no farther justifiable than it is warranted by the graces which exist in the soul: with the increase of those graces it may justly rise; and with the diminution of them it must proportionably fall. Any other assurance than this is unscriptural and vain: but this not only *may be* entertained, but is the privilege and comfort of all who believe in Christ.]

Happy should we be to IMPROVE this subject in such a way only as corresponds with the general tenour of the Apostle’s address: but,

1. Must we not rather take up *a lamentation* over you?

[Of how small a part of our audience can we speak in the terms here used towards the Thessalonian converts! For, where are the works of faith, the labours of love, the patience of hope, of the generality amongst you? Where are those fruits which would warrant your minister to say, that he “*knew* from them your election of God?” What is the faith of the generality, but a dead faith? what their love, but an

^h Eph. iii. 11. 2 Tim. i. 9.

ⁱ Jer. xxxi. 3.

empty name? what their hope, but presumption? We would not willingly speak thus, God knoweth! We would be glad to be found false accusers in this matter. Greatly should we rejoice to be convinced of our error, and to revoke every intimation we have here given. But, whilst the fruit produced by you is no other than what the world at large produce, we can address you in no other terms than those of grief and sorrow. If the fruit be bad, the tree must be bad also. O brethren! examine well the daily operation and effect of your faith and love and hope; and then ask, whether St. Paul would have exulted over you, as he did over the Thessalonian converts? and, if your own consciences testify that he would have found no such cause for joy in you, then learn to relax your confidence of your state before God, and seek to be made "Israelites indeed, in whom is no guile."]

2. Suffer ye then yet farther a word of *exhortation*—

[To those who really possess and manifest the graces before described, we would say, Be thankful to God for his electing love; and give him all the glory of whatever good there is in you. "Press onward too, forgetting what is behind, and reaching forward to what is before:" and never think that you have already attained, whilst and thing remains to be attained.

But to those in whom there is little or no evidence of such a work of grace we would say, For Christ's sake deceive not your own souls. *This* which you have seen in the Thessalonians is Christianity: and *this* is the state to which the Gospel is designed to bring you also: *this* too is the object of all our ministrations: and, if these graces be not wrought in your hearts, we consider ourselves as "labouring in vain, and running in vain." Whilst we see not this effect of our ministrations, how can we "give thanks for you?" or how, with any comfort, can we "make mention of you in our prayers?" Instead of rejoicing over you, we can only mourn and weep on your account^k: and, instead of having the delightful thought of presenting you to God "as the children which God has given us^l," we have the terrible apprehension that we shall prove swift witnesses against you to your eternal condemnation^m. We pray you, brethren, lay to heart these affecting considerations; and begin without delay to seek that entire change both of heart and life, which invariably characterizes the elect of God, and which alone can warrant any hope of happiness in the eternal world.]

^k Jer. ix. 1. and xiii. 17. ^l ver. 19. with Isai. viii. 18.

^m Mal. iii. 5.

MMCXCII.

THE MANNER IN WHICH THE GOSPEL BECOMES EFFECTUAL.

1 Thess. i. 5. *Our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.*

IT is not uncommon for persons to be troubled in their minds respecting their interest in the Divine favour: they want to know whether they belong to the elect. But this is a point which can never be ascertained, except in one way. No man can go up to heaven, and search the book of God's decrees: no man can turn over the pages of the book of life, to see whether his name be written there. The discovery must be made by an examination of our own heart and life. If we find the fruits of the Spirit within us, we know infallibly who the agent is that has produced them; and from such an undeniable evidence of God's love we may safely conclude, that we are elected of him. It was thus that St. Paul discerned the interest which the Thessalonians had in God's electing love. Their "fruits of faith, and labours of love, and patience of hope in the Lord Jesus," flowing as they did from a powerful operation of the Gospel upon their souls, left no doubt upon his mind respecting their state, but enabled him confidently to assert, that "he knew their election of God." He saw the fruit; nor was he at any loss to determine from what root it sprang.

It is for this fruit that we now purpose to inquire: and, in order that we may attain a just knowledge of our state, we shall shew,

I. When the word may be said to come in word only—

By "*our Gospel*" the Apostle means, that which he and his fellow-labourers, Timothy and Sylvanus, had preached to them, and which had "*come to them*" as sent and authorized by God himself. But notwithstanding its divine origin, it comes to many "*in word only.*" Now it comes thus—

1. When it makes no impression on the minds of those who hear it—

[Many hear the Gospel for years, and yet never come to the knowledge of it. Not that they want a capacity to understand it; but they want an inclination to attend to it with that seriousness that it requires. They listen to the voice that utters it; but they do not reflect upon the subject itself; so that it passes through their minds, like a vessel in the ocean, leaving no trace behind. Our Lord compares them to the way-side, on which good seed is sown, but is instantly taken away again by the birds, so that none of it springs up^a. It is truly said of them, that “hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand.”]

2. When it makes no other impression than what mere moral suasion will produce—

[Oratory on some occasions will produce very powerful effects. Even the recital of some calamitous event will greatly affect the passions, and either rouse us to indignation, or melt us to tears. But these emotions are only transient: the memory of the things that caused them vanishes away; and no abiding effect is produced. Thus it is with many who hear the Gospel. They are affected by it for a time: sometimes they are depressed with fear and terror, and sometimes elated with hope and joy; but they experience no radical change of heart and life. Such were many of Ezekiel’s hearers: they were delighted with his eloquence, as people are with a performance of vocal or instrumental music; but their hearts were as much addicted to covetousness, and as averse to real piety as ever^b. Such persons are represented by our Lord as the stony-ground hearers, who receive the word instantly and with joy; but, having no root in themselves, they quickly wither, and come to naught^c. St. James also compares them to men who see their face in a glass, but go away and forget what manner of persons they are^d. Whatever impressions therefore the Gospel may make upon them at the time, it certainly comes to them in word only.]

Such an application of the Gospel being of no value, we proceed to shew,

II. In what way it must come, in order to be effectual—

To whomsoever it be declared, whether to men of greater or less capacity, it must come,

^a Matt. xiii. 4, 19.

^b Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32.

^c Matt. xiii. 5, 6, 20, 21.

^d Jam. i. 23, 24.

1. With a divine energy to the soul—

[The Gospel is “the rod of God’s strength,” even that wonder-working rod whereby the most astonishing miracles are wrought^e. By it “the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life again^f.” Weak as it is in itself, even as the rod of Moses was, it is “mighty through God to the pulling down of the strong-holds of sin and Satan; bringing, not the actions only, but even the thoughts, of men into captivity to the obedience of Christ^g.” This is “the sword which Christ girds upon his thigh^h,” and with which he subdues his enemies. It is “the sword of the Spirit” alsoⁱ. It is, in short, that instrument whereby the Sacred Three accomplish all their mysterious purposes in converting and saving a ruined world. But then it must be wielded by an almighty arm: it must “come in demonstration of the Spirit and of power^k,” or else it will fail of producing any permanent effect. None but He who moved upon the chaos, and formed it into order and beauty, can new create the soul. Such a change may be wrought as we read of in Ezekiel’s vision, where the dry bones came together, and the sinews and flesh came up upon them; but they were only a corpse still, till the Spirit breathed upon them: and then they rose up, even a great army^l. Thus persons who are dead in sin, may be brought to a profession of religion by other means: but nothing short of a divine power can ever “turn men truly from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God^m.” Paul may plant, and Apollos may water; but it is God alone who can give the increaseⁿ.]

2. With an assured sense of its truth and excellence—

[One reason why the Gospel has so little effect, is, that “men do not mix faith with what they hear^o.” They regard it “rather as the word of men, than as the word of God^p.” In going to hear it, they consider themselves as going to hear *a man*; when they should rather go in the spirit of the Centurion and his friends, saying, “Behold, now we are all here present before thee, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God^q.” Moreover the Gospel should be viewed as a remedy, a remedy of God’s providing, and exactly suited to our wants. We should go to hear it, as a hungry person goes to a feast:

^e Ps. cx. 2.^f Matt. xi. 5. with Isai. xxxv. 5, 6.^g 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. See also Jer. xxiii. 29.^h Ps. xlv. 3—5.ⁱ Eph. vi. 17.^k 1 Cor. ii. 4.^l Ezek. xxxvii. 7—10.^m Acts xxvi. 18.ⁿ 1 Cor. iii. 5—7.^o Heb. iv. 2.^p 1 Thess. ii. 13.^q Acts x. 33.

he will not be satisfied with barely looking upon the things that are set before him; he feels an appetite for them; he believes them to be good for him; and he partakes of them for his own personal benefit and satisfaction. When the Gospel comes in this manner, even as it did on the day of Pentecost, it lays open the whole heart^r; it pierces deeper than a two-edged sword^s; and heals the wounds that it inflicts^t. Then it is truly precious to the soul; sweeter than honey or the honey-comb; and more desirable than one's necessary food^u.]

Coming in this manner, the Gospel is of inestimable value; as will appear, while we consider,

III. What effects it will then produce—

It will work in us precisely as it did in those at Thessalonica: it will make us,

1. Imitators of Christ—

[The Thessalonian Christians instantly became “followers of Christ and of his Apostles^x :” they made an open profession of Christianity, and consorted with those who were like-minded with themselves. In the same manner, all who “receive the truth in the love thereof” will “join themselves to the Church,” without any fear of that reproach which their new profession will bring upon them. They have counted the cost, and are willing to pay it. They take up their cross cheerfully, “choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy all the pleasures and honours of the world^y.”

While they call themselves *followers* of Christ and his Apostles, they also become *imitators* of them^z. They will no longer follow the course of this world, but will regulate their conduct by a higher standard: they will look to the example which Christ has set them, and endeavour to “walk as he walked.” His meekness and gentleness, his humility and kindness, his patience and self-denial, his devotedness to God, and love to man, will be progressively transcribed into their hearts and lives; nor will they be satisfied “till they arrive at the measure of the full stature of Christ^a.”]

2. Patterns to their brethren—

[This also is mentioned to the honour of the Thessalonians, as resulting from the manner in which the Gospel came to them^b. And in this all true Christians will resemble them.

^r Acts ii. 37. 1 Cor. xiv. 25.

^s Heb. iv. 12.

^t Acts xvi. 29—34. ^u Ps. xix. 10. Job xxiii. 12.

^x ver. 6.

^y Heb. xi. 25, 26.

^z *μυηταί*.

^a Eph. iv. 13, 15.

^b ver. 7.

One in whom the word has wrought effectually will not be contented with setting a good example to the world around him; (this would be a matter of no great difficulty :) he will make his light so to shine before men, that all, whether believers or unbelievers, may be edified by it. He would gladly say with the Apostle to all who behold him, "Whatsoever ye have seen and heard in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you^c." This distinguished piety is not to be sought by ministers only, (though doubtless they, with their peculiar advantages, ought not to be behind others in any thing that is good^d;) but by persons of every age, and of every class. All should endeavour to grow in grace, that from children they may become young men, and from thence advance till they are fathers in Christ^e. And it is certain, that all who are perfect, or have attained to maturity in the Christian life, will be thus minded^f.]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. What reason for thankfulness *they* have, in whom the Gospel has wrought effectually—

[If we have experienced any spiritual change, we must trace it up to God, as the sole author of it. The power that effected it was not in the word; for then the same change would have been wrought in all who heard it: nor was the distinction occasioned by our own superior wisdom or goodness; for then the wisest and most moral of men would uniformly be the most forward to receive the Gospel; whereas they are rather the most averse to it^g. No; it was God alone who made us to differ^h; and to Him alone must all the glory be ascribedⁱ.]

2. How we are to obtain benefit from the word delivered to us—

[If the mighty working of God's power be requisite, even of the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead^k, we should implore his presence before we go up to his house; we should be lifting up our hearts in ejaculatory prayer while we are hearing his word; and, after the seed has been sown, we should water it with our prayers and tears. *This* is the way which God himself has prescribed^l; and it would insure a blessing, because Christ himself is in the midst of his people, on purpose to bless those who call upon him in spirit and in truth^m. It is owing to the want of this, both in ministers and

^c Phil. iv. 9.

^d 1 Tim. iv. 11.

^e 1 John ii. 12—14.

^f Phil. iii. 12—15.

^g 1 Cor. i. 26—28.

^h 1 Cor. iv. 7.

ⁱ John i. 13.

^k Eph. i. 19, 20.

^l Jam. i. 5. Prov. ii. 2—6.

^m Matt. xviii. 20.

people, that the ordinances are so unprofitableⁿ. Let us then abound more in the great duty of prayer^o; and God will pour out his Spirit upon us^p: He will give us that unction of the Holy One that shall teach us all things^q; and make his word to be “the power of God to the salvation of our souls^r.”]

ⁿ Jam. iv. 2.

^o Eph. i. 16—18.

^p John xvi. 13, 14.

^q 1 John ii. 20, 27.

^r Rom. i. 16.

MMCXCIII.

SCOPE AND END OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

1 Thess. i. 9, 10. *They themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.*

ST. PAUL delighted in bestowing commendation wherever it was due. When writing to the Church at Rome, he told them that “their faith was spoken of throughout the whole world^a; and here he tells his Thessalonian converts, that their faith was so celebrated, that he heard of it wherever he went; insomuch that in every place he was anticipated in his commendations of them, the extraordinary effects of his ministry among them being in all the Churches a general topic of conversation. The particular effects which had been produced he here specifies: and, in considering them, we shall be led to shew,

I. What is the great end and object of our ministrations—

Ministers are ambassadors from God to man: they are sent with tidings of mercy to a rebellious world: but they are sent also to effect a moral change in the hearts and lives of all who receive their message. They are sent to bring men,

1. To serve and obey their God—

[Even Christians, till converted by the Spirit of God, are universally addicted to idolatry. They do not indeed, like the

^a Rom. i. 8.

heathen world, bow down to stocks and stones; but they “love and serve the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for evermore.” “The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life,” possess the supreme place in their affections, and are sought after in preference to God — — — To turn men from these vanities, and to bring them to their God, is the end for which every minister is sent, and at which he should continually aim. And this, we trust, is the object which, in all our addresses, we have in view. Yes, we would bring you to serve the living God, who alone is worthy of your regard; for he alone has life in himself; and he alone can confer life on his devoted servants. But it is not a mere formal service to which we would bring you, but a total surrender of all your faculties and powers to him. This is your “reasonable service.” There is none but God that has any claim upon you. What has the world done for you? or what can it ever do? To whom, or to what, are ye debtors, that ye should consult their wishes, or obey their will? But God has created you, yea, and has redeemed you by the blood of his only dear Son. Ye are therefore in no sense, and in no degree, your own: your bodies, and your spirits, are altogether his; and with them ye must glorify your God alone^b.]

2. To wait for the second coming of their Lord from heaven—

[He who once came down from heaven to suffer for us, and by his own obedience unto death hath “delivered us from the wrath to come,” has been raised up from the dead, and is now exalted to the right hand of God, that he may carry on and perfect the work he has begun. And he will once more come down from heaven to gather together his elect, and to raise them to the fruition of that glory which he has purchased for them. To wait in joyful expectation of that period is the privilege of all his people: and to bring you to such a state of mind is to be the incessant labour of his ministers. We are not to be satisfied with seeing you born to God; but, as loving parents, we are to nourish you in our bosom; that under our fostering care ye may “grow to the full measure of the stature of Christ.” This waiting posture, this constant readiness for the coming of your Lord, is one of the highest gifts to which any man can attain^c. We speak not now of persons waiting, like criminals, for the arrival of their Judge; (that is a state from which it is the Christian’s privilege to be delivered;) but of their waiting as servants for the coming of their Lord. The diligence of servants is prompted, not by fear, but love: and they feel assured of the approbation of

^b 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

^c 1 Cor. i. 7.

their master, when he shall find every thing done, though not with absolute perfection, yet in all material points agreeably to his will. Thus we would have you with your loins continually girt, and your lamps burning with undiminished splendour^d. But perhaps we may give a yet juster view of the state to which we would wish to bring you, if we compare you to “a bride preparing herself” for the arrival of her bridegroom. Such should be the holy, longing desire which you should feel after the coming of your Lord^e: and to assist you in this preparation, that eventually we may present you to him in a state of complete readiness, is the blessed service which we have to perform^f.]

Such is the office of those to whom the cure of souls is assigned: and corresponding with it is,

II. The duty of those to whom we minister—

As we must not seek to please men, but to edify them, so they must not be satisfied with reaping mere instruction, but must determine,

1. To yield themselves up to the full influence of our labours—

[In coming to the house of God, all persons should resemble Cornelius and his friends, when Peter came to minister unto them: “Now are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God^g.” There should be no disposition to cavil at what they hear, or to sit in judgment on the preacher, but a real desire to learn the will of God, and a full determination through grace to do it. If the minister endeavour to probe the conscience, they should welcome the salutary wound, and cry unto the Lord, “Search me, O God, and try the ground of my heart!” If he be endeavouring rather to bind up the broken spirit, they should thankfully embrace the gracious promises of the Gospel, as those who most need the blessings which it offers. If, on the other hand, he be denouncing the terrors of the Lord, they should humble themselves before God in dust and ashes, if peradventure they may be lifted up in due time. And lastly, if he be expatiating on any duty, they should set themselves, like racers in a course, to run with ardour and with patience the race that is set before them. Whoever it be that speaks, and whatever it be that is spoken, provided only it be agreeable to the standard of truth, they should receive it, as the Thessalonians did, “not as the word of man, but as the word of God^h.” The

^d Luke xii. 35—38. ^e 2 Pet. iii. 12. with Tit. ii. 13.

^f Rev. xix. 7. ^g 2 Cor. xi. 2. ^h 1 Thess. ii. 13.

whole assembly of you should come to the ordinances as to a banquet prepared of the Lord; or as the sick and diseased came to our Lord in the days of his flesh, each feeling his own malady, and determined, if possible, to obtain a cure: however difficult it may be to gain access to him, you should press through the crowd, as it were, to touch but the hem of his garment; or seek to be let through the tiling of the house, so that you may by any means find admittance into his presence, and obtain the blessings which you stand in need of. In a word, Christians should be satisfied with nothing short of a perfect conformity to the Divine will; and should come to the house of God with hearts so melted, as easily to be poured into the mould of the Gospel, and permanently to retain the very image of their God.]

2. To display the efficacy of them in the sight of all men—

[The Thessalonians were “ensamples,” not to the world only, but to believers also, and *that* throughout all the regions of Macedonia and Achaia. This is what we also should endeavour to be: we should “shine as lights in the world,” and *in every situation and relation of life* we should so make our light to shine before men, that all who see us may glorify our Father which is in heaven. We should bear in mind, that the honour of God is greatly affected by our conduct; and that our fellow-creatures also may either be “won by our good conversation,” or be eternally ruined by our misconduct. We should, from these considerations, take especial care never to lay a stumbling-block in the way of others; but so to walk, that we may be able to say unto all around us, “Whatsoever ye have seen and heard in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you.” Thus we should “shew to all what manner of entrance the Gospel has had amongst us,” and what are its genuine effects: and thus putting to silence the ignorance of foolish men, we should constrain them to acknowledge, that the doctrines we profess are holy, and “that God is with us of a truth.”]

We conclude with one or two INQUIRIES:

1. What entrance has the Gospel had amongst us?

[Has it so wrought, as to attract the attention, yea, and excite the admiration also, of all around us? Alas! in how many has it produced no change at all! and in how many a change in profession only, or in external conduct, whilst the heart is as worldly, and the temper as unsubdued, as ever! — — — Look to it, brethren, that ye do not thus receive the grace of God in vain: for if the Gospel be not unto you a savour of life unto life, it will be a savour of death, to your more aggravated condemnation.]

2. How may it be rendered more effectual for our good ?

[Search what it is that has hitherto obstructed the operation of the word upon your souls. Some are careless and inattentive, so that the word never enters into their hearts ; in others, the word takes not any deep root ; whilst in others its growth is hindered by the lusts and cares which grow up together with it. All these therefore must be rooted out, that the good seed may prosper and increase. But there is yet another evil, which renders the most faithful ministry unavailing for the good of many : I refer to that pride and conceit which so inflate the hearts of many, and render the Gospel itself odious in the world. This must be mortified ; and a childlike spirit be cultivated in the midst of us. "The meek will God guide in judgment ; the meek he will teach his way."]

MMCXCIV.

THE MINISTERIAL CHARACTER PORTRAYED.

1 Thess. ii. 7, 8. *We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children : so, being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the Gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.*

BOASTING, when it proceeds from vanity, is hateful in the extreme. But there are occasions whereon it may be necessary to declare what the Lord has done for us, or what we have been enabled to do for him. When, for instance, we are suffering under false accusations, it may be necessary to state many things, which none but God has seen. And we have reason to rejoice that St. Paul's enemies constrained him to have recourse to this method of clearing and vindicating his own character ; because by this means we have all his exalted principles clearly developed, and the brightest pattern of human excellence exhibited to our view. But, independent of any such occasions, it is allowable to express the feelings of our hearts, and to bring to the remembrance of those whom we love the opportunities we have had of testifying our regard. It is by such

communications that we revive both in ourselves and others those sublime affections, which constitute the basis of Christian friendship. The Apostle, when writing to the Corinthians, was constrained to sound forth, as it were, his own praises, in order to answer the calumnies that had been circulated respecting him: but in this epistle he speaks only out of the fulness of his heart to those whom he regarded with the most endeared affection: and the whole of what might be called boasting was nothing but the effusion of a mind glowing with love, and animated with the noblest sentiments.

From what he says of himself in the words before us, we shall take occasion to shew,

I. What are the dispositions and habits of a faithful minister—

Ministers are represented in the Scriptures under a great variety of characters. Sometimes they are called shepherds, whose office is to search out the straying sheep, and bring them to the fold of Christ: and, when once brought thither, to watch over them with all imaginable care, “strengthening the diseased, healing the sick, binding up the broken, bringing back again any that have been driven away:” and as to the lambs, they are to “carry them in their bosom, and gently to lead those that are with young^a.”

But they are designated by a far more exalted character, even that of a father; which comprehends in it every thing that is tender and endearing^b. How much of care and responsibility is involved in this relation, may be judged from the complaint which Moses poured out before God, when he was called upon to stand, as it were, in this relation to all the people of Israel^c.

There is however a still more tender image by which God is pleased to represent his own stupendous love to his people, and by which also the

^a Ezek. xxxiv. 2, 4. and Isai. xl. 11. ^b 1 Cor. iv. 14, 15.

^c Numb. xi. 11—14.

duty of ministers is portrayed; I mean that of a mother, nursing her infant offspring^d. St. Paul, declaring his anxiety for the welfare of his converts, compares his feelings with the pangs of a woman in child-birth^e; and his delight in them, with that of a mother cherishing in her bosom her new-born infant. The language in our text is exquisitely beautiful and touching. The nurse spoken of, is not an alien, but a nursing-mother: it is not in her arms only, but in her bosom, that she cherishes the child. In all her treatment of it, she is not harsh, as one that is soon wearied in performing offices of love; but gentle. If absent from her infant for a few hours only, she is most affectionately desirous of it, and delights to draw forth to it the breast, even though it be with great pain and inconvenience to herself; and she would impart to it, as it were, her vital strength, yea, her very soul: and all this she does to it because of the tender affection which she bears towards it. The whole creation does not afford a sublimer image than this; yet this fitly represents the conduct of St. Paul towards the Church of Christ, and consequently, the conduct of every faithful minister, in proportion as he resembles St. Paul.

Mark then, under this image, the habits of the faithful minister;

1. His tender affection—

[St. Paul's concern for his converts was never surpassed by that of any mother for her children. If there was the least reason to fear that any temptation had operated to the injury of their souls, he had no rest in his spirit, till he had ascertained their real state; and, if he received a favourable account of them, then every trial was easy, and every affliction light^f. Thus it is also with every servant of the Lord Jesus. "If any man care not for his sheep, he is an hireling," and unworthy of the name of a minister of Christ. The true shepherd will, I had almost said, "lay down his life for the sheep." Well he knows that nothing but the Gospel, faithfully administered, can benefit their souls: and this he is willing to impart to them to the utmost of his power, as the remedy for all their diseases, and as a supply for all their

^d Isai. lxvi. 10—13. ^e Gal. iv. 19. ^f 1 Thess. iii. 5—8.

wants: and, according to its efficacy upon their souls, will be his hopes and fears, his joys and sorrows. "He has no greater joy than to see his children walk in truth^g."]

2. His self-denying exertions—

[St. Paul wrought with his hands by night, to supply his own temporal necessities, whilst he laboured, with incredible exertion, throughout the day, to communicate spiritual benefits to the souls of men. Though he might justly have claimed a maintenance for his body, yet he forebore to do it, that he might have the satisfaction of dispensing freely the blessings which he himself had so freely received^h. Every minister indeed is not called to forego in like manner his claims of temporal support; but every minister should be able to declare to his people, as in the presence of God, "I seek not yours, but you." The only object of a faithful servant of Christ is, to advance the welfare of his people: for this end he will "not count even life itself dear to him," but will "endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal gloryⁱ." And if he be really called to sacrifice his life in the sacred cause, he will account it rather a ground for congratulation than any cause of sorrow or condolence^k.]

But, as in every relation of life there are duties belonging to the one side as well as the other, it will be proper for us to consider also,

II. The reciprocal obligations of a faithful people—

A husband and wife, a parent and child, a magistrate and subject, have each their appropriate duties; and so have also a minister and his people: and as the minister's duties are fitly represented by those of a mother, so those of the people may justly be considered as analogous to those of an affectionate and obedient child. They owe then,

1. Love to his person—

[In this very epistle, wherein St. Paul testifies such unbounded love to his converts, he tells them what they also ought to feel towards those who ministered unto them: "We beseech you, brethren, to know them who labour among you,

^g 3 John, ver. 4.

^h ver. 9. and 2 Thess. iii. 8, 9. with 1 Cor. ix. 12—18. and 2 Cor. xi. 7—12.

ⁱ Acts xx. 24. and 2 Tim. ii. 10.

^k Phil. ii. 17, 18.

and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake¹." We speak not here of that partiality, which renders men unwilling to receive the Gospel from any one besides their own favourite minister;—*that* is a reprehensible attachment, leading to an idolatrous regard to some, and a contemptuous disregard of others: but a grateful sense of the obligations conferred by those who labour in the word and doctrine, ought to be cultivated and expressed by all^m. Indeed it can scarcely be carried to too great an extent: it should not stop short of any sacrifice, not even of the surrender of life itself, if by such means their labours may be preserved for the Church of Christⁿ.]

2. Attention to his instructions—

[No one can doubt whether this be the duty of a child towards his parent^o: and it is equally the duty of a people towards their spiritual parent. A minister is sent especially from God himself to impart unto them the knowledge of the Gospel. Though he is only an earthen vessel, he has the treasures of salvation committed to him for the benefit of others; and, as a faithful steward, he is to dispense them to all according to their several necessities. He is to them in the place of God himself. He is to them in God's stead, when he is proclaiming to them, in his name, the word of reconciliation. His word, as far as it agrees with the inspired volume, is the word, not of man, but of God: and they who despise it, despise not man, but God^p.]

3. Submission to his authority—

[This in the Church of Rome is carried to an absurd and impious extent: but in the reformed Churches, and especially in our own, it is almost entirely set aside; and a minister who claims the measure of authority which God has given him for the edification of his Church, is considered as an usurper. But what would be the consequence, if the parent had no authority in his own family? What but confusion must ensue, if all his children thought themselves at liberty to follow their own inclinations, without any direction or restraint from him? True, a minister is "not a lord over God's heritage:" his authority relates only to things pertaining to the welfare of his Church; but in these his judgment should be a rule of conduct to those committed to him. This is the command of God himself respecting it: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls,

¹ 1 Thess. v. 12, 13. ^m 1 Tim. v. 17. ⁿ Rom. xvi. 3, 4.

^o See Deut. xxvii. 16. ^p ver. 13. and 1 Thess. iv. 8.

as they that must give account; that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you^a.”]

4. Co-operation with him in every good work—

[A minister cannot do every thing. Moses had seventy elders given to him, as assistants in his great work: and such should our people be in the Church of God. They can aid in instructing the rising generation: they may do incalculable good, in searching out the wants and necessities of the poor, and in administering, not to the temporal benefit only of their neighbours, but also to the benefit of their souls. Women, as well as men, have much in their power: and, without the aid of their people, it is little, comparatively, that any ministers can effect. The Apostles themselves were greatly indebted in this respect to their people; and to this even St. Paul ascribed, in some degree at least, the efficiency of his labours^r. What if, in a large family, the children cannot supply the place of their father? can they do nothing to second his endeavours, and to promote the welfare of the whole? Thus then should even the weakest amongst our people labour, according to their ability, to promote to the uttermost the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom, and the glory of his great name. The richer part should contribute of their abundance to help forward every pious and benevolent plan; and the poorer afford their aid also in any way that may best comport with their sphere, and be best suited to their several capacities.]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. How is such a blessed state of things to be *produced*?

[Let all consider the relation into which they are brought: and above all, let them consider, how the honour of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the success of his Gospel, are involved in *their* conduct. Ministers can never hope to be extensively useful, unless they put away all worldly and selfish interests, and labour to attain all those holy feelings which their station imperiously demands. Nor can any people really adorn their holy profession, unless they also on their part seek to become as little children, and cultivate a humble, loving, and heavenly deportment. Let us then, each in his station, aim at this; and pray earnestly to God for his grace, which alone can qualify us for the discharge of our respective duties.]

2. How is such a blessed state of things to be *revived*?

^a Heb. xiii. 17.

^r Rom. xvi. 1, 2, 6, 9, 12.

[It must be expected that where the Gospel has been long preached, Satan will sow tares with the wheat, and that evils of some kind or other will arise. It was so in the apostolic age, and it will be so in every age. It were unreasonable to expect that it should be otherwise, considering how corrupt the hearts of men are, and how easy it is for any one of a perverse spirit to create dissension. But if what we may call the family union and harmony have been interrupted, every one should exert himself to the uttermost to restore the bonds which have been dissolved. Let all in the first place set themselves to find out what has been the occasion of dissension; and endeavour, if possible, to remove the cause, and especially to subdue and mortify those evil dispositions which have unhappily been exercised. If there be any of a perverse spirit, withdraw from them, that they may be put to shame^s. If any be conscious that they have done amiss, let them repent and humble themselves before God and man^t. Thus will evil be done away: thus will Satan also, our great adversary, be disappointed: and thus shall we all “grow together an holy temple in the Lord.”]

^s Rom. xvi. 17, 18. and especially 2 Thess. iii. 6, 14, 15.

^t 2 Cor. vii. 8, 9.

MMCXCV.

THE DUTY OF THOSE WHO ARE CALLED.

1 Thess. ii. 11, 12. *Ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.*

NEXT to the example of our blessed Lord, there is none so worthy of imitation as that of St. Paul. He appears to have been so entirely cast into the mould of the Gospel, that he was a living image of all that it requires. In the ministerial office especially he was almost a perfect pattern. His intrepidity, his singleness of heart, his self-denial, his fervent zeal for God, and tender love to man, never were surpassed, nor ever equalled by any human being. Respecting the purity of his intentions, and the probity of his conduct, he could appeal to all among whom he had laboured, yea to God also: *no*

less than eight times in eleven verses does he repeat this appeal; so conscious was he that he had exerted himself to the utmost of his power to promote the welfare of his fellow-creatures, and the glory of his God.

In the appeal before us we may notice,

I. The duty of Christians—

The first great duty of those to whom the Gospel comes, is to believe in Christ^a. But yet even this is subservient to a higher end, even to the attainment of holiness, and the glorifying of God by a heavenly conversation. The Christian is not to be satisfied with low attainments, but to walk worthy of his God; to walk worthy of him,

1. As his Governor—

[God has given us a law which is a perfect transcript of his mind and will. This law is to be the rule of our conduct. In obeying it therefore we must not select the easier parts, and overlook the precepts which are more difficult: we must not attempt to reduce the standard to our practice; but rather endeavour to raise our practice to the standard. We should not inquire, How little can I do, and yet escape punishment? but rather, What can I do to please and honour my Divine Master? How shall I commend to others his government? How shall I convince them that his service is perfect freedom? How shall I illustrate his perfections by my own conduct? How shall I make my light so to shine before them, that all who behold it shall be constrained to glorify my God, and to take upon them his light and easy yoke?]

2. As his Benefactor—

[God has “called” his people, not by the word only, but also by “the effectual working of his power:” he has called them to be subjects of “his kingdom” on earth, and heirs of “his glory” in heaven^b. This distinguishing grace calls for every possible expression of love and gratitude. Our one inquiry therefore should be, “What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done unto me? How shall I walk worthy of such a Benefactor? Shall not my soul overflow with love to him? Shall I not “delight myself in him;” and “present myself a living sacrifice to him;” and

^a 1 John iii. 23. and John vi. 28, 29.

^b Eph. ii. 19. 2 Thess. ii. 13.

strive incessantly to "glorify his name?" Shall I think any thing too much to do or suffer for his sake? Shall I not seek to be "pure as he is pure," and "perfect as he is perfect?" Surely, "as He who has called me is holy, so should I be holy in all manner of conversation^c."

This is the Christian's duty; thus to argue, and thus to live.]

In order to enforce this subject yet further, we will consider,

II. The duty of ministers—

It is through the exertions of ministers that God carries on his work in the hearts of his people. Ministers are set apart on purpose to teach men their duty, and to urge them to the performance of it. They stand related to their people as a parent to his children: and in the exercise of their high office, they are to address them with parental tenderness, and parental authority.

"Suffer ye then the word of exhortation," while we endeavour to impress upon your minds a due regard for holiness: and permit me, however unworthy of the sacred office, to address you,

1. In a way of affectionate entreaty—

["God has called you unto holiness:" and "this also we wish, even your perfection." Consider then, I beseech you, how much is to be attained by your advancement in holiness.

Consider, how it will *contribute to your present happiness*.—Experience must long since have shewn you, that there is no comfort in religion, when we are living at a distance from God, or in the indulgence of any besetting sin. We hope too you have found how "pleasant and peaceful are the ways" of godliness, when we are steadfastly walking in them. Go on, and you will have continually increasing evidence, that "*in keeping God's commandments there is great reward*."

Consider also how your piety will *promote the good of others*. We speak not of the benefit that will arise to society from the good offices you do them; but of the effects which your good example will produce. If your life be not "such as becometh the Gospel of Christ," the world will despise religion as a worthless unproductive thing: and those who profess godliness will be apt to catch the infection, and to sink into lukewarmness. But if you "walk worthy of your vocation," you will

^c 1 Pet. i. 15.

“by your well-doing put to silence the ignorance of foolish men;” you will constrain them to confess, that the principles which operate so powerfully on your souls, must needs be good; and you will perhaps win many, who would never have been won by the word alone^d.

Consider further how it will *advance your eternal happiness*. What though there be no *merit* in your works, shall they not be rewarded? Shall not every one reap according to what he sows^e; and that too, not according to the quality only, but the quantity also, of his seed? Yes; “every man shall be rewarded according to his own labour^f,” he shall “reap sparingly or bountifully, according as he has sown^g,” and every talent that is improved shall have a correspondent recompence in the day of judgment^h.

What further inducement can you wish for? Only reflect on these things, and surely I shall not have “exhorted” you in vain.]

2. In a way of authoritative injunction—

[St. Paul, when least disposed to grieve his people, said to them, “As my beloved sons, I warn youⁱ.” And in the text he tells us, that he “charged” them in a most solemn manner, and *testified*^k unto them. Behold then, we testify unto you that the holiness which we inculcate is of prime importance, and indispensable necessity.

Consider that *nothing less than this will prove you to be real Christians*. If you are “Israelites indeed, you must be without guile.” If fire descend from heaven into the bosom to consume your lusts, it will burn till all the fuel be consumed. The contending principles of flesh and spirit will never cease from their warfare, till the flesh be brought into subjection^l. “If you are Christ’s, you have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts^m.” Deceive not yourselves; for, “whomsoever you obey, his servants you areⁿ.” If you are born of God, you will not harbour any sin^o, or be satisfied with any attainment^p; but will seek to be “righteous, even as God is righteous^q.”

Consider that *nothing less will suffice to comfort you in a dying hour*. When you come to that solemn season, things will appear to you in a different light from what they now do. The truths, which have now gained your assent indeed, but float in your mind as though they were devoid of interest or

^d 1 Pet. iii. 1.

^e Gal. vi. 7, 8.

^f 1 Cor. iii. 8.

^g 2 Cor. ix. 6.

^h Matt. xxv. 28, 29.

ⁱ 1 Cor. iv. 14.

^k μαρτυρούμενοι.

^l Gal. v. 17. 1 Cor. ix. 27.

^m Gal. v. 24.

ⁿ Rom. vi. 16.

^o 1 John iii. 9.

^p Phil. iii. 12—14.

^q 1 John iii. 7.

importance, will then present themselves to your mind as the most awful realities. What will you then think of cold and lifeless services? What bitter regret will seize you, and terrible forebodings too, perhaps, when you look back upon a partial obedience, and an hypocritical profession? O that you may not fill your dying pillow with thorns! O that you may serve the Lord in such a manner now, that in that day you may "enjoy the testimony of a good conscience," and "have an abundant entrance into the kingdom of your Lord and Saviour!"

Consider, lastly, that *nothing less will avail you at the bar of judgment*. We repeat it, that you will not be saved for your works: but we repeat also, that you will be dealt with *according to your works*. It will be to little purpose to have cried "Lord, Lord," if you are not found to have done the things which he commanded^s. God has said, "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully^t;" nor will either our self-commendations, or the applause of others, avail us, if the heart-searching God do not bear witness to our integrity^u.

Behold then, as in the sight of God, we testify these things; and charge you all, that if you would ever behold the face of God in peace, you make it the great object of your life to walk as becometh saints, and to "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things."]

APPLICATION—

[The Apostle contented not himself with *general* exhortations; but addressed himself to individuals; even, as far as he could, to "*every one*" of his people. Let me then apply my subject more *particularly* to you, dispensing to each his portion in due season.

Are there among you *those who make no profession of religion*?—Think not that you are excused from that strictness which is required of the saints. As the creatures of God, you are bound to obey him; and as "bought with the inestimable price of his Son's blood, you are bound to glorify him with your bodies and your spirits, which are his^x." Nor should it be any consolation to you that you make no profession of religion; for, if you have not been called to be subjects of God's kingdom, and heirs of his glory, you are vassals of Satan, and partakers of his condemnation.

Are there *any who, by reason of their unsteady walk, are ready to doubt whether they have ever been effectually called*? Let me both "*exhort and charge*" them not to leave this

^r 2 Pet. i. 10, 11. with Ps. xxxvii. 37.

^s Matt. vii. 21—23. with Luke vi. 46.

^t Jer. xlviii. 10.

^u 2 Cor. x. 18.

^x 1 Cor. vi. 20.

matter in suspense; but to obtain of God that "grace that shall be sufficient for them." Let me at the same time suggest some considerations proper to "*comfort*" and support their minds. They would ask perhaps, How shall I gain the object of my wishes? How shall I walk worthy of my God? I answer, "*WALK IN CHRIST^y*," in a continual dependence on the merit of his blood, and the assistance of his good Spirit. By his blood ye shall be cleansed from guilt: "by his Spirit ye shall be strengthened in your inner man," and enabled to do whatever He commands^z.

Finally, let *all*, whatever they may have attained, press forward for the prize of their high calling, and endeavour to abound more and more.]

^y Col. ii. 6.

^z Phil. iv. 13.

MMCXCVI.

A DUE RECEPTION OF THE GOSPEL.

1 Thess. ii. 13. *For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.*

A PARENT of a numerous family must expect trials of various kinds: yet will He have many consolations to counterbalance them. And so it is also with the faithful minister. Both from without his Church and from within, he will experience much that is painful and afflictive: but, if his afflictions abound, so will his consolations also: if his doubts respecting the state of some of his people renew in him pangs, like those of a woman in travail, the progress and advancement of others will afford him much heartfelt satisfaction. Thus St. Paul found it. The anguish that was occasioned in his bosom by some of his converts, was so keen, that he could scarcely speak of them without weeping: but over others he rejoiced with a very lively and exalted joy. The Church at Thessalonica in particular was contemplated by him with pre-eminent delight; inso-much that, whenever the thought of them occurred

to his mind, he could not but pour out his soul before God in praises and thanksgivings in their behalf.

It is our intention at present to shew,

- I. What there was in his ministry among them which occasioned such incessant thankfulness to God—

His success among them was great, not only as to the number of his converts, but especially in the spirit which they manifested. In ministering to them the Gospel, there were two things in particular which filled him with joy and gratitude; namely,

1. The manner of its reception—

[They did not consider his word as a system, like that of different philosophers, invented by man, and standing only on human authority; but they regarded it as the word of God himself, even whilst it was delivered to them by a weak instrument, “a man of like passions with themselves.” They looked, through the messenger, to Him whose ambassador he was; and every word that was uttered by him was received as if it had been spoken from heaven by the Deity himself: they received it as *proceeding from his love*, as *sanctioned by his authority*, and as *assured to them by his truth and faithfulness*. The great wonders of redemption through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus were not looked upon “as a cunningly devised fable,” but as a most stupendous effort of divine wisdom, planned from all eternity in the councils of the Father, and executed in due season by his only-begotten Son, and applied to their hearts by the agency of the ever-blessed Spirit — — — They felt not themselves at liberty to reject these overtures of mercy, or to cavil at them as exceeding the comprehension of our feeble reason; they considered that they had no alternative, but to believe, and live: or to disbelieve, and perish — — — But their acceptance of these overtures was not a matter of constraint: they saw that the veracity of God was pledged to fulfil every promise which the Apostle made to them in Jehovah’s name; and that it was as impossible for a penitent believer to perish, as it was for God to lie — — — How could he be otherwise than thankful, when his word among them was thus received?]

2. The manner of its operation—

[Truly his word among them was “quick and powerful;” and most effectually did it work upon them in *their first conversion*, in *their subsequent support*, and in *their progressive sanctification*. He speaks before of “the entrance he had had

among them," in that "they had turned from idols to serve the living and true God:" and, immediately after our text, he mentions the heavy trials they had had to endure; which yet they had sustained with unshaken fortitude: and the tidings he had heard from Timothy, of their advancement in faith and love and every grace, completed his joy, so that he forgot all his own afflictions through his joy on their account^a. What could he desire more than this? St. John, who had been admitted to nearer intercourse with his Saviour than any other of the Apostles, knew no greater joy than this^b. Well therefore might St. Paul pour forth his soul to God in praises and thanksgiving for such a mercy as this.]

In St. Paul's acknowledgments we may see,

II. What grounds of thankfulness all ministers have, whose labours are so blest—

Wherever the Gospel is so received, and so operates, there is abundant cause for praise and thanksgiving unto God;

1. For the people's sake—

[Happy, thrice "happy are the people that are in such a case, yea happy are the people who have the Lord for their God." "Who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord^c!" Can we reflect on the change that has taken place on you, and not rejoice? "Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are dug." Do ye congratulate Lot on his escape from Sodom? What was that fire in comparison of those burnings from which ye are escaped? He was saved to die at last: you are saved to live for ever. You are not merely delivered from the power of darkness, but are translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, yea, and are made heirs together with him of an everlasting inheritance. Little can we know of the value of an immortal soul, if we are not filled with joy and gratitude at the thought of such blessings being imparted to it.]

2. For the Church's sake—

[No language could adequately express the transports of the saints of old, when they contemplated the effects that are here described: "Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel^d."

^a 1 Thess. iii. 6, 7. ^b 3 John, ver. 4. ^c Deut. xxxiii. 29.

^d Isai. xlv. 23. See also Ps. xcvi. 11—13. and xcvi. 1—9.

Where such children are multiplied, Zion, the mother of them all, may well rejoice: her honour will be great; her happiness exalted: with what joy will she draw forth her breasts of consolation to her numerous offspring! with what delight will she dandle them on her knees, and bear them in her arms^e! In the sight of all the world shall she be glorified; and she shall be a blessing to all around her^f.]

3. For the world's sake—

[The dishonourable conduct of professors is a stumbling-block to the world; as our Lord has said, “Woe unto the world because of offences.” But wherever the sanctifying operations of the Spirit appear, there “the ignorance of foolish men is put to silence;” and they are constrained to acknowledge the excellency of the principles which they hate. Independently of any spiritual benefit, the world are greatly advantaged by the progress and advancement of true religion: for if they will only inquire, Who are the great promoters of every charitable institution, they will find that the most active agents are uniformly found amongst those who love and profess the Gospel. But besides this, their spiritual welfare is greatly advanced by the blameless and heavenly deportment of professing people: their prejudices are weakened, and they are often led to inquire candidly into those principles, which they see to be productive of such blessed effects.]

4. For the Lord's sake—

[It is from the Church alone that God has any glory upon earth. But when his people do indeed adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour, their light constrains many to glorify their heavenly Father. Then too does the Saviour himself rejoice: he “sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied.” Yea, God the Father too is comforted, if we may so speak, in the successful issue of his eternal counsels: “He beholds his obedient people with infinite satisfaction;” “he rejoices over them with joy; he rests in his love; he joys over them with singing^g.” Can we then behold events in which God the Father and God the Son take so deep an interest, and not be thankful for them? If we ourselves love God in any measure as we ought, we shall rejoice in his joy, and glory in his glory.]

SEE from hence,

1. Whence it is that the word preached is so generally ineffectual to any saving purpose—

[As in the wilderness, so now, “the word preached does not profit men, because it is not mixed with faith in them that

^e Isai. lxvi. 10.—13.

^f Isai. lx 13, 14.

^g Zeph. iii. 17.

hear it." Men do not hear it as the word of *God*. They see nothing, and hear nothing, but a man like themselves; and therefore they hear without interest and forget without remorse. But be it known to all, that their disregard of God's messages, by whomsoever delivered, involves them in the deepest guilt^h, and will subject them to the heaviest punishmentⁱ.]

2. How it may be made effectual to the good of our souls—

[Whenever you come up to the house of God, come with prepared hearts, as Israel did to Mount Sinai at the giving of the law. Look through the minister to God himself. Sit at his feet, as Mary at the feet of Jesus. Seek not to be *pleased*, but *edified*. Do not indulge a critical and captious spirit; but "receive with meekness the engrafted word;" and then you shall find it both able and effectual to save your souls^k. If it be a precept or an exhortation, a promise or a threatening, receive it as if it were addressed to you by an audible voice from heaven: so shall it descend on your souls as dew or rain, that fail not to accomplish the ends for which they are sent^l.]

^h 2 Chron. xxvi. 12. 1 Thess. iv. 8.

ⁱ Heb. ii. 1—3. and x. 28, 29.

^k Jam. i. 21.

^l Isai. lv. 10, 11.

MMCXCVII.

CHRISTIANS THE JOY OF THEIR MINISTERS.

1 Thess. ii. 19, 20. *What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy.*

THE relation between a minister and his people is a subject rarely touched upon, except in addresses exclusively intended for those who sustain the pastoral office. But it is a subject of general importance; and ought to be felt by the people, as well as by the minister; between whom there should be at all times a feeling of reciprocal affection. A pious pastor does not undertake his office in order to feed himself with the fat, and clothe himself with the wool, of his flock. No; he has higher objects in view: he seeks their best interests, and makes their

welfare his chief concern. The epistles of St. Paul, not those addressed to Timothy and Titus merely, but those addressed to whole Churches, are full of this subject. This to the Thessalonians is almost one continued breathing of parental tenderness, on the Apostle's part, and a call on his converts for correspondent emotions on their part. The extreme ardour of his affection for them is indeed the immediate subject of all the preceding context. He had been driven from them suddenly by a violent persecution; and it was owing to the unabated malice of his enemies that he had not visited them again. Greatly had he longed to do so; and repeated efforts had he made; for they were exceeding dear to him, as he tells them: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? Yes, ye are our glory and joy."

From these words we will take occasion to shew,

I. In what light a faithful minister views his people—

If a man be a faithful servant of Christ, the prosperity of his people will be the one aim of all his labours, and the one source of all his joys: both at the present hour, and in the prospect of the eternal world, their welfare will be "his hope, his joy, his crown of rejoicing." Is it asked, Wherefore they are so dear to him? we answer, He glories in them;

1. As witnesses for God—

[God is excluded as it were from this lower world. The great mass of mankind acknowledge him not, or acknowledge him in word only, and not in deed and in truth. But true believers confess him openly before men: they are his witnesses, that he is great, and worthy to be feared; that he is good, and worthy to be loved; that he is faithful, and worthy of entire trust and confidence. But yet more particularly they are witnesses of all his perfections, as united and glorified in the cross of Christ; and they proclaim to all around them, that, in Christ Jesus, God is "a just God and a Saviour," yea "just, and yet the justifier of all that believe in Jesus." These are the truths which ministers have it in commission to make known to the sons of men: and by the free publication of

these truths they hope to turn men from the guilt and dominion of sin, to peace with God, and universal holiness. Obstinate unbelievers will deride this attempt as visionary: but the minister of God can point to his converts as living witnesses for God, and as monuments of the saving efficacy of his Gospel; and in this view they give him a ground of joy and exultation far beyond all that the whole world besides could afford. Hence "he glories in them in the Churches," as God himself also does, seeing that "they are to him for a name and for a praise and for a glory" throughout the whole earth.]

2. As trophies of the Redeemer's grace—

[There is not one of them who was not once a bond-slave of Satan, "the god of this world, who ruleth in all the children of disobedience." But secure as they once seemed to be in the hands of "the strong man armed, the stronger Potentate, even Jesus, has rescued them" from his dominion, and "brought them into the glorious liberty of the children of God." Jesus, when he yet hanged upon the cross, triumphed over the principalities and powers of hell, and "by death overcame him that had the power of death;" but in his resurrection and ascension he triumphed yet more, "leading captivity itself captive." But it is in the preaching of his word that all this is made to appear. By that men are "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." Not that he drags them like captives at his chariot-wheels, but rather takes them up with him into "his chariot, wherein he goes forth conquering and to conquer." How Jesus exults in them in this view may be judged from that expression of the prophet; "Ye are a crown of glory and a royal diadem in the hands of your God^a." No wonder therefore that the soldiers of Christ, through whose instrumentality the victory has been won, exult also.]

3. As the fruits of his own labour—

[It is rarely, if ever, now, that faithful servants of Christ are suffered to labour, like Isaiah, fifty years, and, like Hosea, seventy, with scarcely any visible fruits of their ministry. Though God does not make equal use of all, yet, if they be faithful, he will not leave them without witness^b: he will "accompany their word with signs following." Were they left to "labour in vain and run in vain," their hands would soon hang down, and their hearts faint: but when they see "the dry bones quickened, and the dead come forth out of their graves," through the influence of their word, they greatly

^a Isai. lxii. 3.

^b Jer. xxiii. 22.

rejoice^c. They point to such persons as “seals of their ministry^d,” and as attestations from God, that the word delivered by them is His word. It is said of women, that, when once they behold the fruit of their travail, they “forget, as it were, all their pangs, for joy that a man-child is born into the world.” And thus it certainly is with those who minister in holy things. Much they have to endure in the prosecution of their great object: but when they see sons and daughters born to God, they account their labours richly recompensed; and, for the attainment of such a blessing “they count not even their lives dear unto them.”]

4. As pledges of his own eternal felicity—

[There is, it is true, no merit in converting sinners unto God, seeing that the whole work is God's alone. “Whoever plant or water, it is God alone who gives the increase.” But it is nevertheless true, that “they who turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever^e.” It is not indeed in proportion to every man's *success*, that a recompence will be bestowed: but according to every man's *labour* it will^f. And O! what a blessed period will that be, when the faithful minister shall present his converts before the throne of God, saying, “Here am I, and the children thou hast given me!” Not even in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ himself will he forget those with whom, as St. Paul expresses it, he once travailed in birth: “there will they be his joy and crown of rejoicing:” there will they be, as it were, jewels in his crown. Every fresh accession to the Church thus enhances the minister's joy: and in the prospect of this, “he joys according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil^g.”]

But since it is not over *all* that a minister can rejoice, we proceed to shew,

II. Who they are whom he can truly recognize under this character—

In the first ages, when every one was exposed to so much peril on account of his Christian profession, there was reason to hope that all were sincere: and therefore the Apostle could say to the whole Philippian Church, “It is meet for me to think thus of you all.” But Christianity is professed now under far other circumstances: and the great mass of those

^c Ezek. xxxvii. 9, 10.

^f 1 Cor. iv. 8.

^d 1 Cor. ix. 2.

^g Isai. ix. 3.

^e Dan. xii. 3.

who are called by the name of Christ are far from being “a joy and crown of rejoicing” to their minister. Even of religious professors, there are great multitudes “of whom we must stand in doubt,” and of whom we cannot speak, but with grief^h. Those who alone will ultimately prove the joy and crown of their ministers, are,

1. Those who embrace the faith—

[There must be a real conversion of the soul to God. It is not necessary that this conversion be sudden, or that it should be attended with such circumstances as shall enable a person to declare the precise time and manner in which it was accomplished: but it is necessary that every man should have an evidence within himself that he is “translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God’s dear Son.” He must receive Christ into his heart, and build on him as the only foundation of his hope. “Christ must become truly precious to his soul.” Christ must be his life, his peace, his strength, his joy, his all. Till this be done, a minister can have no comfort in any man, because he has no ground to believe him truly and savingly converted to God: but when this change is manifest (for no natural man in the universe ever thus gloried in Christ alone,) then does the person in whom it is wrought become the joy and crown of his minister: he then, in the judgment of charity, is brought to the fold of Christ: and his minister, like a faithful shepherd, rejoices over him, as a sheep that was lost, and is found.]

2. Those who walk in love—

[If there be a mere adoption of Christian *principles*, without the attainment of Christian *practice*, this change will produce no satisfaction in the heart either of God or man. But if there be a corresponding change in the heart and life of a professor, and a suitable exercise of Christian graces and tempers, then the minister will feel a proportionable confidence respecting a work of grace within him: seeing the fruit to be good, he will conclude that the tree is good also. The grace of love in particular must be predominant. “This is the grace whereby all men are to know whether we be Christ’s disciples.” If pride, envy, malice, or any other temper contrary to love, reign in the heart, we only deceive ourselves in fancying ourselves Christians: we are yet in darkness, and children of the wicked oneⁱ. A minister can only weep over such persons:

^h Phil. iii. 18.

ⁱ 1 John ii. 9—11. and iii. 10, 14, 15. and iv. 7, 8.

they are a grief to him here^k: they will be yet more so in that day when the Lord Jesus Christ shall come to judge the world^l: they themselves too, if they be not undeceived in time, will have to bewail their delusions to all eternity. Love is absolutely and indispensably necessary to prove the sincerity of our faith. If that reign not in the heart, our faith is but the faith of devils: but if that be the governing principle of our lives, then have we “that which accompanies salvation;” and a minister may confidently rejoice over us as the elect of God^m.]

3. Those who advance in holiness—

[It is essential to grace, that it grows and advances in the soul. The children of God’s family are all expected to grow from “babes” to “young men,” and from young men to “fathers.” Now, as a mother, however she might rejoice at the birth of her infant, would soon cease to rejoice, if it did not grow in stature and in strength; so is a minister’s joy turned into grief, if he see his people making no proficiency in the divine life, but continuing under the habitual influence of those defects which characterized them in their unconverted state, or in the earlier stages of their professed conversion. O ye who profess godliness, consider this; and inquire whether you do indeed make your profiting to appear? It is only when we have clear evidence that you are growing up into Christ as your living Head, and progressively transformed into his image, that we can glory in you, or look forward with comfort to that awful meeting which we shall have with you in the great day of the Lord Jesusⁿ.]

We will IMPROVE this subject,

1. In a way of appeal—

[The text is an appeal to the whole Church at Thessalonica, that he had sought nothing, and gloried in nothing, in comparison of their spiritual welfare. And the same appeal, we hope through grace, we can make also^o. Yes, blessed be God, we can, and do, appeal both to you and to God himself, that that we have lived but for the benefit of those committed to our charge, and “have known no greater joy than to see our people walk in truth.” Permit us then to ask, whether ye can make the same appeal to the heart-searching God? Have ye sought, as the one great object of your life, so to improve our ministrations, that “ye might be our joy and crown of rejoicing

^k 2 Cor. xii. 20, 21.

^l Heb. xiii. 17.

^m 1 Thess. i. 4. Heb. vi. 9.

ⁿ 1 John ii. 28.

^o Of course, no minister will proceed to make such an appeal, if he has not a testimony in the consciences of his people, that what he says is true.

in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" Has there also been a reciprocity of affection, so that "we have been your rejoicing, even as ye also have been ours, in the prospect of the great day of the Lord Jesus^p?" Let this be well fixed in all your minds, that unless the regard between a minister and his people be mutual, and their endeavours to reap benefits from his ministry keep pace with his efforts to impart them, little ultimate good can result from the connexion: on the contrary, the word which he labours to make unto you "a savour of life unto life, will prove in the issue a savour of death unto death."]

2. In a way of exhortation—

[A meeting must soon take place between us before the judgment-seat of Christ: and in reference to that awful period St. Paul exhorted the Thessalonian Church, saying, "We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by *our gathering together unto him*^q." In reference to that solemn meeting we also would exhort you. In a little time we shall be called to give an account of our ministrations, as you also will of your improvement of them. Let not him who wishes you to be his joy and crown be disappointed of his hope. If he have not to "present you in a perfect state to Christ in that day," all his warnings and instructions will have been lost upon you^r, yea, worse than lost, seeing that he will be "a swift witness against you."

O ye, who have never yet been converted by the labours of your minister, let him now prevail on you to turn unto the Lord with your whole hearts — — —

And let those of you who look up to him as your spiritual Father, hold fast the truth ye have received, and endeavour to shine more and more as lights in the world, that his joy in you may be complete in the last day^s. Yes, we would address you in the words of Paul to his Philippian converts; "My brethren, dearly beloved, and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand ye fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved^t."]

^p 2 Cor. i. 14.

^q 2 Thess. ii. 1.

^r Col. i. 28.

^s Phil. ii. 15, 16.

^t Phil. iv. 1.

MMCXCVIII.

THE PEOPLE'S STABILITY IS THE MINISTER'S COMFORT.

1 Thess. iii. 8. *Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.*

THERE is nothing that more strongly characterizes a faithful ministry, than the mutual affection that is

found to exist between the minister and his stated hearers. The people, while they retain any just regard for their Lord and Saviour, will love those who have been his instruments for good to their souls^a: and those who are instrumental in bringing others to the knowledge of salvation, will consider their converts as their children, “whom they have begotten to God,” and “with whom they have travailed in birth^b.” We see this exemplified in all St. Paul’s epistles, especially in that before us. After a short stay at Thessalonica, he was driven from thence by “certain lewd fellows of the baser sort,” who sought to kill him; and who, on hearing that he was fled to Beræa, followed him thither with the same intent, and drove him thence also. He was now at a great distance from them, and very apprehensive on their account; lest the sufferings which he had endured for them, and the trials which they themselves also experienced, should have deterred them from maintaining their steadfastness in the faith. “When therefore he could no longer forbear^c,” he thought it better to be left at Athens alone, than to remain any longer in uncertainty about them; and accordingly he sent his only friend and companion, Timothy, to see them, and to report to him their state. Having heard a good account of them, he declares, that all sense of his own personal afflictions vanished, as soon as he heard of their spiritual advancement; and that his spirits, which had been exhausted by a long and painful suspense, were revived, so that he began, as it were, to “live” anew, since he was informed that they “stood fast in the Lord.”

From the words before us we shall take occasion to shew,

I. What is that stability which all Christians must attain—

When any persons first receive the Gospel, so as to yield themselves up to its influence, they are said

^a Gal. iv. 15. ^b 1 Cor. iv. 15. Gal. iv. 19.

^c Twice mentioned, ver. 1, 5.

to "be in Christ:" when they make advances in grace, they are said to "walk in Christ:" and when they are established in a firm adherence to the truth, they are said, as in the text, "to stand fast in the Lord." This is that stability which is required of us; namely, a stability in *the faith, the profession, and the practice* of the Gospel.

1. In the faith of the Gospel—

[There are many things which may occasion us to make shipwreck of the faith^d — — and many more, which may rob us of the vital experience of it in our souls^e — — — But all these must be withstood: we must "hold fast the form of sound words that hath been delivered to us;" and, not contented with a barren orthodoxy, we must live altogether by faith in the Son of God, enjoying his presence, and "receiving out of his fulness grace for grace" — — —]

2. In the profession of it—

[When persecution arises because of the word, a separation is made between the professors of religion, as the corn and chaff are separated when tossed to and fro in the sieve. But woe be to us, if we be like the chaff, that is driven away with the wind. We must "not put our light under a bushel," but be bold, and "quit ourselves like men:" we must "endure hardships as good soldiers of Jesus Christ:" we must "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering:" we must be "willing to be bound, or even to die, for the name of the Lord Jesus:" we must not count our lives dear to us, so that we may but finish our course with joy. It is true, we are not to court persecution by an indiscreet declaration of truths, which people are not yet prepared to receive: but we must in no respect deny Christ: "if we draw back, it will be unto perdition:" "if we only look back," after having put our hands to the plough, we are not fit for the kingdom of God:" "he that loveth his life, shall lose it; and he only that is willing to lose his life for Christ's sake, shall save it unto life eternal."]

3. In the practice of it—

^d A conceit of our own wisdom, Rom. i. 22. Isai. xlvii. 10; a fondness for philosophy and vain deceit, Col. ii. 8; a listening to the disputes of heretics, 2 Tim. ii. 16—18; an undue regard to ceremonial institutions, Col. ii. 16—19; or an erroneous idea of the merit of good works, Rom. x. 3.

^e Love of the world; sloth, &c. &c.

[In times like ours, it is easy to retain orthodox opinions, and to keep up a profession of religion: but many are found enlisted under the banners of Christ, who are not really "fighting the good fight of faith." Even in matters of plain truth and honesty, it is not every professor that can bear a scrutiny into his conduct: yea, there really is often found a higher sense of honour and integrity amongst the men of this world, than amongst some, of whom better things might have been hoped. In respect of tempers, too, there are many who will talk of Christ, and shew a love to his Gospel, who are yet proud, haughty, imperious, passionate, contentious; many who are so fretful and impatient on every trifling occasion, as to make all around them uncomfortable; many too, who, when they ought rather to be judging themselves, are constantly judging others with uncharitable severity. But let not those who possess so little of the meekness and gentleness of Christ, imagine that they are standing fast in the Lord: for, whatever experience they may have had in times past, they are certainly in a state of awful departure from him. We must possess the image of Christ, and we must advance in the attainment of it, or else our faith and our profession will be vain^f.

But if there be no particular deviation from the path of duty in these things, yet may we have greatly declined from true religion. We must preserve a spirituality of mind, a zeal for God, a love to his ways, a delight in secret communion with God, and a tender regard for the temporal and eternal welfare of our fellow-creatures. This is the stability which chiefly characterizes the growing Christian, and which is the surest evidence of an interest in Christ.]

That all may be stirred up to seek this stability, we shall shew,

II. Why the attainment of it lies so near to the heart of every faithful minister—

A minister stands related to his people as a pastor to his flock, over which he is to watch, and of which he must give a strict account: and his solicitude about them, instead of terminating when they are brought into the fold, may be said then more properly to commence. He will be anxious about their attainment of stability in the divine life,

1. Because the honour of God is deeply interested in it—

^f Jam. i. 26.

[Let any professor of religion either renounce his profession, or dishonour it by any misconduct, and the world will immediately cry out against religion, and represent all the professors of it as hypocrites. Thus it was that "the name of God was blasphemed" on account of David's fall: and thus "the way of truth is evil spoken of" at this time; as though religion were only a cloak for wickedness. On the other hand, the name of God is glorified, when his people adorn their holy profession: the light which they reflect around them, compels many to acknowledge the beneficial influence of his Gospel, and the powerful efficacy of his grace^g.

And can ministers be indifferent about the honour of their Divine Master? If they are so dear to him, that "whoso toucheth them, toucheth the apple of his eye," ought not He, and His interests, to be dear in their sight? Ought not rivers of tears to run down their eyes, when men keep not his law, and especially when his sacred name is blasphemed through those who bear his name and profess his religion? Yes; much as they must feel when an injury is done to themselves, their grief is incomparably more poignant, when they see their blessed "Lord crucified afresh, and despise done to the Spirit of his Grace."]

2. Because their salvation altogether depends upon it—

[It is not sufficient that men "run well for a season;" they must "endure to the end, if ever they would be saved." To what purpose are we *in* Christ, if we do not *stand fast* in him? Our departure from him only makes "our last end worse than our beginning." And is not this a fearful consideration to all of us? When St. Paul saw reason to stand in doubt respecting his Galatian converts, "he travailed in birth with them, as it were, a second time, till he should have clear evidence that Christ was truly formed in them." And whoever reflects upon the value of a soul (in comparison of which the whole world is lighter than the mere dust upon a balance), must have continual sorrow and heaviness in his spirit, when he sees any moved away from the hope of the Gospel, and "forsaking the fountain of living waters for broken cisterns that can hold no water."]

3. Because the great ends of the ministry are answered by it—

[When any persons turn, either in faith or practice, from the holy commandment delivered to them, "all the labour we have bestowed upon them is in vain:" it is even worse than in

^g Matt. v. 16.

vain, because it will bring upon them a more aggravated condemnation. What a reflection is this for those who have spent their strength, and perhaps jeopardized their very lives for the salvation of their fellow-creatures! Can we wonder that the declension of those who have professed our holy religion, should be as a dagger in the hearts of those who have watched and laboured for their souls; and that the lives of faithful ministers should be bound up, as it were, in the stability of their people? The beloved Disciple could say, "he had no greater joy than that his children walked in truth:" and, no doubt, his greatest grief was, as that of every faithful minister must be, to see any of them departing from it.]

We shall CONCLUDE our subject with a few words,

1. Of grateful acknowledgment—

[It would not always be proper to commend people to their face: yet on some occasions the Apostle judged it expedient to do so^h. We rejoice therefore in bearing testimony to the steadfastness which you have maintained during our afflictive separation from you; and we can truly say with the Apostle, that "in all our affliction we have been greatly comforted by your faithⁱ." "We thank God for all the joy wherewith we joy before him on your account;" and we pray, that "what he has thus begun in you, he may carry on and perfect until the day of Christ."]

2. Of affectionate warning—

[Never let it be forgotten, that we must first *be* in Christ, before we can *stand fast* in him. If apostates are in an awful condition, so also are they who have never embraced the Gospel of Christ. We must flee to Christ, as our only refuge from the wrath of God; and must seek to be found *in him*, not having our own righteousness, but that which is of God through faith in him.

Let the saints too remember (what the text strongly intimates), that they are in continual danger of falling. They have a subtle enemy, whose devices have ruined thousands, even of those who once appeared eminently holy. "Let him therefore that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."]

3. Of joyful encouragement—

[It is not *in yourselves*, but in *the Lord*, that you are to stand fast: and while you are placing all your dependence on

^h 1 Thess. i. 2, 3. and 2 Thess. i. 3, 4.

ⁱ Verse before the text. This was after almost a whole year's intermission of the author's labours as a minister. But any other occasion, such as heresies or contentions resisted by them, may be referred to.

him, he is engaged to "keep you by his own almighty power unto everlasting salvation." "Be strong then in the Lord, and in the power of *his* might." "His grace is sufficient for you," and shall "make you more than conquerors" over all your enemies. Weak as you are in yourselves, "He is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." "As then ye have received the Lord Jesus Christ, so walk ye in him, &c.^k"]

^k Col. ii. 6, 7.

MMCXCIX.

A MINISTER'S JOY IN HIS PEOPLE.

1 Thess. iii. 9, 10. *What thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God; night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?*

THE connexion between a minister and his people is little considered, and little felt. A general concern on his part, and a respectful esteem on theirs, are deemed adequate expressions of their mutual regard. But the relation of a father is not nearer than that which a minister sustains towards those whom he has begotten by the Gospel: nor should their mutual feelings be a whit less tender than those of a parent and a child. "They should be his joy; and he theirs^a." It was in this light that St. Paul regarded his Thessalonian converts. They were the fruit of his ministry. It was the word delivered by him that had been made effectual to their conversion to God^b; and they had greatly adorned their holy profession^c. He had meditated a longer stay among them; but had been driven away from them suddenly, by the violence of persecution^d. He had also made repeated attempts to return to them; but had been prevented by the determined hostility of his enemies^e. Not knowing how far they might be able to maintain their

^a 2 Cor. i. 14.

^b 1 Thess. i. 5, 6.

^c 1 Thess. i. 7, 8.

^d Acts xvii. 1—10.

^e 1 Thess. ii. 18.

steadfastness, he felt extreme anxiety in their behalf: and “when he could no longer forbear, he thought it good to be left at Athens alone,” rather than continue any longer in such painful suspense respecting them. He dismissed Timothy therefore, though he could but ill spare the labours of so dear a friend, to inquire into their state, and to bring him a faithful account of their progress^f. The tidings he received were highly favourable; and they filled him with unutterable joy; his very life being bound up, as it were, in their welfare^g. Indeed, he had never ceased to pray, and with extreme earnestness, to God, to open a way for his return to them, and to make him still more useful to their souls. Of this he assures them, in the words which we have just read; which will lead me to shew you,

I. The delight which a pious minister has in the fruits of his ministry—

A pious minister has troubles which are unknown to others; so also has he joys, which are peculiar to himself. God makes use of him, to gather out of the ungodly world a Church and people; and over them he rejoices with a very sublime joy. He rejoices in,

1. Their past deliverance—

[Lately, how different was their state from what it is now become! “They were afar off from God; (alas! how far!) but now they are made nigh by the blood of Christ:” they were “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise; but now are made fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” Now, how can a minister contemplate his people as “recovered out of the snare of the devil, by whom they had been led captive at his will,” yea, and as “brands plucked out of the burning,” even out of the fire, as it were, of hell itself, and not rejoice? Was it a matter of exceeding joy to the lame man to be restored, so that “he went into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God?” and was it a matter of grateful admiration to an assembled populace, when they saw all manner of *bodily* diseases healed? and must it not fill a minister’s heart with joy to see the *souls* of men dispossessed and healed? to see

^f ver. 1, 2, 5.

^g ver. 6—8.

them "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God?" Verily, he must be very unworthy indeed to have such an honour conferred upon him, who does not exult and leap for joy at the benefits imparted through the instrumentality of his word.]

2. Their present walk—

[They are brought to a state of peace, with God, and in their own souls. This is a blessing, of which no others can have any just idea: for there is "a peace that passeth all understanding;" and "there is no such peace to the wicked." Moreover, they are enabled to "walk in newness of life," and to approve themselves faithful servants to their God. In truth, they are the only people from whom God has any tribute of praise and honour. From the world at large he has nothing but an unmeaning observance of forms and ceremonies; but from these, the service of the heart. They are "lights in a dark world:" they are "witnesses for God:" they are "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men." Peradventure, too, they may be chosen vessels, to convey the same rich treasure to others, and to dispense to a benighted world the benefits which they themselves have received. How can a minister look on these, and not sing for joy? Does a parent rejoice in the progressive advancement of his children, in their opening prospects of further attainments, and in the hope that they shall one day prove blessings to the world? Much more must a pious minister rejoice in the growth of his people in faith and charity, in the honour which by their holy walk they bring to God, and in the benefits which they confer on men. We wonder not, that, in hearing such tidings of his Thessalonian converts, the Apostle could say, "We were comforted over you, in all our affliction and distress, by your faith^h."]

3. Their future destinies—

[For them is prepared a throne of glory, on which they shall reign for ever and ever in the presence of their God: and the very angels in heaven are waiting, as it were, with eager expectation, to instal them there: nor do they ever execute a commission with sublimer joy than when sent down from heaven to receive a departing spirit, and to bear him on their wings into the realms of bliss. Let a minister view his people in this light, and contemplate what they shall shortly be—the very angels not so exalted, or so near their God, as theyⁱ; and must he not rejoice? The very stones would cry out against him, if his heart did not leap for joy at such a

^h ver. 6—8.

ⁱ Rev. v. 11. The angels are round about the elders.

thought as this. To expatiate upon the glory of that state is needless: suffice it to say, that every glorified saint will be filled with bliss according to the utmost extent of his capacity, and *that* without alloy, or intermission, or end: and for this it is, that the minister is preparing them with tender assiduity and incessant care: and well may he water these plants with joy, when he recollects whose planting they are, and where they shall grow to all eternity.]

His joy, however, is mixed with affectionate solitude; as will be seen, whilst we consider,

II. The great object which he aims at in all his intercourse with them—

In his absence from them will he pray to God in their behalf; yea, “*very exceedingly*^k” will he pray for them: (for this is the best test and evidence of love:) and, when he shall have again the happiness of ministering unto them, he will labour to advance their every grace, but chiefly “their faith.” *This* (their faith), I say, he will particularly endeavour to increase^l, and to extend to the uttermost,

1. Its realizing views—

[Men imagine, that an assent to the truth of the Gospel is faith: but such a faith as that *may be* no better than the faith of devils; of whom it is said, that they “believe and tremble.” But true “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen:” it gives a reality to things invisible and future, as if they were actually before our eyes. It does not merely acknowledge our fall, and our recovery by Christ; but it brings them home with power to the mind, so as to produce a suitable feeling of those truths in our souls. Let us suppose a sepulchre opened before us, and all its nauseous and offensive contents exhibited to our view: we may easily conceive what disgust we should feel: yet is it no other feeling than what a believing apprehension of our own inward corruptions will create in our souls; insomuch, that we shall “lothe ourselves,” yea, and “abhor ourselves, even as holy Job did, in dust and ashes.” We may form some idea, too, what our feelings would be, if we were shipwrecked, and saw the boat, to which we were about to commit ourselves, stored with such necessary articles as the impending danger

^k This seems to be the force of the word *ὑπερεκπερισσού*. See also Phil. iv. 12.

^l See Phil. i. 25. and 2 Thess. i. 11, 12.

would admit of, and by the help of which we hoped to reach a place of safety. Such is the light in which faith will present the Lord Jesus Christ to our view. Our lost state by nature and practice we shall feel, together with the absolute impossibility of preserving ourselves by any thing that we can do. We shall see the Saviour offering himself to us as the means afforded us by God for our deliverance; and we shall with eager solicitude commit ourselves to him, if peradventure we may escape the perils of the sea, and reach in safety our destined port. The whole work of salvation will become a reality, in which all the emotions of hope and fear will be roused, and the utmost efforts of our souls be called into activity. Nay, it is not merely the alternative of life or death that will press upon us, but the infinitely more fearful alternative of heaven or hell; of heaven, with all its glory; or hell, with all its terrors. I need not say how the sight of such things operates in relation to the body: and surely a realizing view of them by faith will not operate less powerfully in relation to the soul. To this state, then, a minister will labour to bring his people, that they may have the most vivid apprehensions of divine truths, and live under an impression of them as strong as if they were actually made visible before their eyes.]

2. Its influential energies—

[Nothing but faith will produce an abiding influence upon the soul. How that will operate, we see at large in the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews: and to have it operate in that way upon his people's minds, will be the continued aim of every pious minister. He will not be content to see them "run, as uncertainly; or fight, as one that beateth the air:" he would have them like people engaged in the race, who have no time to look about them; and as people in actual combat, who must either slay their adversary, or be slain. We need not ask why those persons so exert themselves: the reason is plain: with them, the duty to which they are called is a reality. Others may trifle; but *they* cannot: *they* have too much at stake. Others may think it an easy thing to get to heaven: *they* find it calls for the utmost exertion of all their powers. Others may imagine that they have within themselves a sufficiency of all needful strength: *they* know that a new-born infant is not weaker than they; and that, if not aided by continual supplies of grace and strength from above, they must inevitably and eternally perish. Hence they "live altogether by faith in the Son of God;" applying to him for every thing, and "receiving every thing out of his fulness." This is *living* Christianity: this is *practical* religion: and to this every pious minister labours to bring his people;

that so, at whatever moment they be summoned to the presence of their God, they may be found ready, and meet for the inheritance provided for them.]

This subject will clearly SHEW us,

1. What is the source of all our other deficiencies—

[Faith is at the root of all that is good; and unbelief, of all that is evil. According to our faith will every grace be found within us. Look at a person in a state of departure from his God: to what is his condition owing? There is “in him an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.” Look at persons anxious to attain the highest grace, so as to be able to forgive their brother, not seven times, but seventy times seven: for what do they pray? an increase of *love*? no; but of faith: “Lord, increase our *faith*.” But turn to the world around you; and you shall see, that unbelief is the one great source of all their rebellion against God: they believe not that he will call them to so strict an account as he has declared he will; and, consequently, they see no need of such humiliation, and such earnestness in the divine life as he calls for. Let them once be brought to *believe* these things, and they from thenceforth regard the care of their souls as “the one thing needful” — — —]

2. What we should chiefly seek for in the ministry of the word—

[What the enlightened minister chiefly labours to impart, we should chiefly labour to obtain. Doubtless we should not be unmindful of *any* grace: but we should remember, that faith is the parent of all the rest. It is faith that “overcomes the world,” and “works by love,” and “purifies the heart.” Let me then recommend to you to seek increasing views of Christ, so as to realize his presence with you. Put him before your eyes, as dying for you on the cross; as interceding for you at the right hand of God; as possessing all fulness for your use. Realize his great and precious promises, as made to you, and as in due season to be fulfilled to you: and from day to day take Pisgah views of the Promised Land, till you obtain a blessed foretaste of your inheritance. This is the way to “walk by faith;” and in this way you shall proceed with joy, till your faith be turned into sight, and your hope into fruition.]

^m Luke xvii. 5.

MMCC.

THE EFFECT OF LOVE ON UNIVERSAL HOLINESS.

1 Thess. iii. 12, 13. *The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.*

THE grace which is most generally spoken of in the Holy Scriptures as establishing the souls of men, is faith: "If ye believe not," says the prophet, "ye shall not be established^a:" and again, "Believe in the Lord your God, and so shall ye be established^b." It is by faith that we lay hold on the word of God; and by faith that we commit our every concern to God; and by faith that we expect the accomplishment of all that God has promised: and therefore the composing and establishing of our minds in relation to all future events is properly represented as the fruit of faith. But there is a sense in which love also establishes the heart, as the Apostle intimates in the passage before us; where he prays, that God would make the Thessalonian Christians to abound in love, *in order to* the establishment of their hearts in universal holiness. In this view love is sometimes united with faith, as concurring with it to strengthen and fortify the soul; as when Christians are said to "have on the breastplate of faith and love."

But this effect of love not being generally understood, we will enter the more carefully into the subject, and point out,

I. The influence of love on universal holiness—

Love is an extremely powerful principle in the heart of every one that is truly born of God: it is the great wheel which sets the whole machine in motion, and gives a vital energy to every part. In that chiefly does the new man consist; and from it does every Christian grace derive its strength.

^a Isai. vii. 9.

^b 2 Chron. xx. 20.

1. It rectifies all the powers of the soul—

[Self has usurped an entire dominion over the whole race of mankind. It has pervaded and debased all their faculties. The understanding is so blinded by it, as to be incapable of seeing any thing in its true light: and the judgment is so perverted, that men universally “call evil good, and good evil; they put darkness for light, and light for darkness; bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter^c.” The will is altogether indisposed for exertion, except in that line where self may be gratified, and our own ease, or pleasure, or interest, or honour may be advanced. Even conscience itself is an unfaithful guide, having no sensibility at all, except in concurrence with the corrupt dictates of a perverted judgment and a carnal will.

But let love come into the heart, and assume that ascendancy over it which God has ordained, and all these faculties will receive a new direction,—I had almost said, a new power. Now as soon as truth is proposed to the mind, its beauty and excellence shall be discerned, and its superiority to every adverse principle shall be acknowledged. Now also, notwithstanding the yet remaining bias of the corrupt nature towards what is evil, the prevailing and dominant inclination will be towards what is good; the Divine nature within us counteracting the motions of the old man, and not suffering it any longer to retain the mastery over us; and the conscience continually impelling us to greater measures of conformity to God’s revealed will.

This process will be best seen by some examples placed before our eyes. The Apostle Paul, previous to his conversion, had all the advantages which a man could have for the improvement and direction of all his faculties: but yet every faculty of his soul was entirely engaged on the side of sin. Not having *love* in his heart, notwithstanding his fancied rectitude, he was no better than a savage beast in his conduct towards the Christian Church: “he breathed out nothing but threatenings and slaughter against them,” and thought all the while he was acting in the path of duty, and rendering to God an acceptable service^d. But when once he was converted to God, and brought under the influence of a principle of love, he condemned all which he had before approved^e; and was willing to die for those, whom he had just before laboured to destroy. We may behold the same effect in those who were converted on the day of Pentecost. Compare the state of their minds when they came together that morning, and when they separated, and our subject will have all the elucidation that can possibly be desired^f.]

^c Isai. v. 20.^d Acts xxvi. 9, 10.^e 1 Tim. i. 13.^f Compare Acts ii. 13. with Acts v. 44, 45.

2. It enters into every action of the life—

[It is as the soul, which pervades, and operates in, every part of the body. We are apt to view it only in some particular *act*; but it enters into, and forms, the very *habit* of the soul. St. Paul's description of it will serve us as a rule whereby to judge of its office, and as a clew whereby to discover its most hidden operations. "Love (or 'charity,' as it is called,) suffereth long, and is kind; it envieth not, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things^g." Here we see, that not only our actions towards others, but the dispositions of our own minds in secret, are most materially affected by it; and consequently, that its influence extends to every branch of universal holiness^h.]

3. It prepares the soul for heavenly communications—

[Dispositions that are contrary to love, bar the soul against God: they shut out good, from whatsoever quarter it might come. If a man under their influence read the Bible, what is it but "a sealed book?" If he attempt to pray, the heavens to him are as brass: his prayers have no power to ascend: they have no warmth in them: they freeze upon his very lipsⁱ. If he enter into conversation, there is no savour in any thing he says, nor any capacity to receive good from any thing he hears. In the public ordinances, and in his private chamber, he is alike dull and formal. Go where he will, or do what he will, he neither communicates good, nor receives good.

But when love comes into his soul, his heart is expanded and enlarged towards both God and man. To God he goes with holy confidence, and finds access even to his very bosom^k: and "God, who is love" itself, delights in his own image as reflected from the suppliant's face, and rejoices to communicate to him all the blessings of grace and peace. A soul filled with love is just such an habitation as God delights in; and he will not fail to descend and dwell in it^l. Nor is it in relation to this life only that a person under the influence of love enjoys this confidence; he looks forward, even to the day of judgment, with a sweet assurance, that that God, whose image he so earnestly desires to bear, will not cast him into outer darkness^m. Let the same person now go into company, or

^g 1 Cor. xiii. 4—7.^h 1 John ii. 10.ⁱ 1 Pet. iii. 7.^k 1 John iii. 18, 19.^l 1 John iv. 16.^m 1 John iv. 17. These words in our translation are scarcely intelligible. The sense of them, in the Author's apprehension, is,

attend the public ordinances, or take up the blessed word of God, he has new eyes, new ears, new feelings altogether. There is an unction of the Spirit upon his soul, that enables him to derive edification from every thingⁿ, and to diffuse, wherever he goes, “a sweet savour of the knowledge of Christ.” His love is like “the ointment of the right-hand which bewrayeth itself,” refreshing both himself and all around him with its sweet odours. In a word, there is no limit to the communications which such an one may expect from “God, who doth already dwell in him, and whose love is, and shall be, perfected within him^o.”]

Seeing then that love is of such fundamental importance, let us notice,

II. The attention due to it under this particular consideration—

Love, for its own sake, should be cultivated to the uttermost: but when we consider its vast influence both on our present and eternal welfare, we should seek it with all our might. This appears from the solicitude which the Apostle expressed for the growth of the Thessalonians in this heavenly virtue. In reference then to his expressions, we say,

1. Let us seek to abound in it—

[Whatever advancement any persons may have made in this virtue, they should still press forward for higher attainments in it, desiring to “increase and abound in it more and more.” The Thessalonians were eminently distinguished in this respect, so as not to need from the Apostle any instructions on the subject: yet even then did he exhort to “increase more and more^p,” imitating and emulating his love to them^q. Consider for a moment the Apostle’s love to them, the ardour, the tenderness, the efficiency of it: he compares his feelings with those of a father, yea, and of a nursing mother towards

“Herein is our love perfected; so that we have boldness in [reference to] the day of judgment; because as he is, so are we in this world, [we bearing his image, who is love itself.]” This makes a clear and important sense of the passage. For such a construction of *ἵνα ἔχωμεν*, see 1 John i. 9. *ἵνα ἀφῇ*. See also Mark iv. 12. *ἵνα βλέπωσι*, compared with Matt. xiii. 13. where the word used is *ὅτι*. See also how *ὅπως ἂν* (a yet stronger expression) is used, Rom. iii. 4; and see a *precisely similar construction*, Rev. xiii. 13. *ἵνα καὶ πῦρ ποιῇ*.

ⁿ 1 John ii. 20, 27.

^o 1 John iv. 12.

^p 1 Thess. iv. 9, 10.

^q The text.

her infant offspring. And such was his anxiety about them, that he could scarcely endure his existence, till he was assured of their spiritual welfare; and he was as willing to lay down his life for them, as a mother was to draw forth the breast to her sucking child^r. Now such is the love that we should all aspire after: for nothing short of this is required of us by Almighty God^s.]

2. Let us entreat God to work it in us—

[“Love is of God^t:” nor can any but God create it in the heart. We may attempt to stir up in others this heavenly flame, but we shall never succeed, till God himself shall send down fire from above, and create the vital spark in the soul. Solomon justly observes, that “if a man would give all the substance of his house for love it would be utterly condemned^u.” We may labour and toil to the uttermost; but our efforts will only be like those of the Disciples, when they strove in vain to row their ship to shore, till Jesus entered into their vessel; and then they were immediately at the land whither they wished to go^x. In many cases, the “more abundantly we endeavour to testify our love, the less we shall be loved^y;” yea, we shall only be “casting our pearls before swine, that will turn again and rend us^z.” But God can in one moment kindle the sacred flame, even in the soul that has indulged the most inveterate malignity. Behold the jailor: one hour he executed his commission against Paul and Silas with savage and needless cruelty; the next, he washed their stripes with all imaginable tenderness and love^a. Let us cry then to him for the gracious influences of his Spirit, to create us anew, and to form and fashion us after his blessed image.]

3. Let us be stirred up to this especially from the consideration before us—

[Shortly is the Lord Jesus Christ coming with all his glorified saints to judge the world: and then will an inquiry be instituted, not after this or that particular grace, but after universal holiness. This consideration surely ought to weigh with us, and to make us thoroughly in earnest in the pursuit of love. Many grounds of confidence we may appear to have; but they will all fail us in that awful day: “Our knowledge may be so extensive, as to embrace all the mysteries of religion; our faith so strong, as to remove mountains; our liberality so great, as to give all our goods to feed the poor; and our zeal so ardent, as to give our bodies to be burned;—and yet, for

^r 1 Thess. ii. 7, 8, 11. and iii. 1, 5, 6, 7.

^t 1 John iv. 7.

^y 2 Cor. xii. 15.

^u Cant. viii. 7.

^z Matt. vii. 6.

^s 1 John iii. 16.

^x John vi. 18—21.

^a Acts xvi. 24, 38.

want of a radical principle of love in our souls, it may profit us nothing; and we may be, in God's estimation, no better than sounding brass or tinkling cymbals^b." O, how carefully should we examine ourselves as to the existence of this principle within us, and how ardently should we seek its increase! "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he:" if he be altogether under the influence of love, "he fulfilleth the law," and is approved of his God: but, if this be not the reigning principle in his soul, whatever he may be, or whatever he may do, "he is in darkness even until now^c," and will be consigned to everlasting darkness at the last day^d.]

With those who feel the importance of this subject, two QUESTIONS will naturally arise;

1. How shall I know whether my love increases?

[This question deserves an attentive consideration: for, if we form our judgment on inadequate and erroneous grounds, we shall only deceive ourselves to our everlasting destruction. Let not any then imagine that their love increases, because they feel an increased attachment to any particular individual or party, or have a general desire to do good. If we would form a correct estimate of our love, we must examine *what difficulties it surmounts, what sacrifices it makes, and what victories it gains* over every selfish inclination or corrupt affection? "If we love those only who love us, what do we more than others? do not even the Pharisees the same?" We must "love them that hate us, and bless them that curse us, and do good to them that despitefully use us and persecute us:" and it is in this way only that we can approve ourselves "children of our heavenly Father." Enter then deeply into the workings of your own hearts: see how far pride, and anger, and malice, and envy are mortified within you; and how far humility, and meekness, and forbearance, and forgiveness, and a disposition to prefer others in honour above yourselves, are risen up in their stead, and are brought, though under the most trying circumstances, into easy and habitual exercise. Real love has, if I may so say, an intuitive and instinctive operation. See it in the mother of the child which Solomon ordered to be divided between the claimants: she did not need to reason upon the matter; but love, instantly operating in her soul, inclined her to sacrifice her own interests for the good of her child. So it is that love will evidence itself, wherever it exists: it will rise to the occasion, whatever the occasion be; it will "heap coals of fire on the head" of those whom it cannot otherwise soften; and, "instead of being overcome of evil, it will overcome evil

^b 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3. ^c 1 John ii. 9, 11. ^d 1 John iii. 14, 15.

with good." Try yourselves by this standard, and you will soon see what the state of your souls is before God.]

2. What shall I do to get an increase of it?

[Many directions here might be given : but we will content ourselves with only one. Nothing but love will beget love : nor will any thing but a sense of God's love to us prevail to create in us any real love towards our fellow-creatures : we must know what he has done in laying down his life for us, before we can feel any disposition to lay down our lives for the brethren. But if by grace we are enabled to "comprehend in some good measure the height and depth and length and breadth of Christ's love," then shall we be transformed by it into his image, yea, and "be filled with all the fulness of God^e." Contemplate then this stupendous mystery : dwell upon it, as it were, incessantly in your minds : muse upon it, till the fire of divine love kindle in your souls : and from thus "beholding his glory, you shall be changed into his image from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord^f."]

^e Eph. iii. 18, 19.

^f 2 Cor. iii. 18.

MMCCI.

ADVANCEMENT IN HOLINESS ENFORCED.

1 Thess. iv. 1. *We beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.*

OUR blessed Lord, when about to leave the world, commanded his Apostles to go and "proselyte all nations" to his religion, "teaching them at the same time to observe and do all things that he had commanded them." Thus, in their ministrations, principle and practice were to go hand in hand. But many are disposed to separate what he has thus united ; some making the Gospel little else than a system of moral duties ; whilst others omit duty altogether, and occupy themselves entirely in establishing their own peculiar views of its doctrines. Both of these parties we conceive to be wrong. A superstructure is nothing without a foundation ; neither is a foundation any thing without a superstructure. Each indeed has its

appropriate place; but both are alike important: for if, on the one hand, the superstructure will fall, without a foundation; so on the other hand, it is for the sake of the superstructure alone that the foundation is laid. St. Paul, "as a wise master-builder," was careful at all times to lay his foundation deep and strong: but, having done this, he was careful also to raise upon it a beauteous edifice, such as God himself would delight to inhabit^a. This appears in all his epistles, not excepting those which are most devoted to the establishment of sound doctrine. In the epistle before us he seems to have had little else in view, than to assure the Thessalonians of his tender regard for them, and to excite them to the highest possible attainments in universal holiness. He was ready enough to acknowledge, that his instructions had produced the most salutary effects upon them; but he was anxious that they should still press forward for higher attainments, as long as any thing should remain to be attained.

The words which we have just read consist of an appeal, and an exhortation. Let us consider,

I. The appeal—

St. Paul had not sought to amuse them by curious speculations; nor had he given them maxims whereby they might please and gratify their fellow-creatures. His object had been to bring them to such a holy and consistent "walk," as would be pleasing and acceptable to their God. What kind of a walk that is, it will be profitable for us to inquire.

If we would so walk as to please God, we must,

1. Walk *in* Christ, by a living faith—

[This is particularly required by St. Paul in the Epistle to the Colossians: "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so *walk ye in him*^b." By this is meant, that we should walk in a continual dependence on the Lord Jesus Christ for all those blessings which we stand in need of. He is the fountain of them all: they are treasured up in him, on purpose that we may have them secured for us against every enemy^c.

^a 1 Cor. iii. 10, 11. Eph. ii. 22.

^b Col. ii. 6.

^c Col. iii. 3.

Do we need a justifying righteousness? To him we must look for it, and from him we must receive it: "We must call him, The Lord our Righteousness^d." Do we need grace to sanctify and renew our souls? From him we must receive it, according to our necessities^e. Our wisdom, our strength, our peace, our all, is in him, and must be derived from him in the exercise of faith and prayer^f. Thus it was that St. Paul himself walked: "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me^g." And thus it is that we also must live, depending on him for every thing, and glorying in him alone^h.]

2. Walk *after* Christ, by a holy conversation—

[This also is particularly specified by another Apostle as essential to an acceptable walk with God: "He that abideth in him ought himself also so to *walk even as he walked*ⁱ." Our blessed Lord "has left us an example, that we should follow his steps." Like him, we must live altogether for God, making it "our meat and our drink to do his will." Like him, we must rise superior to all worldly cares, or pleasures, or honours, "not being of the world, even as he was not of the world." Like him, we must exercise meekness and patience, and forbearance, and love even to our bitterest enemies, never swerving in the least from the path of duty for fear of them, nor yielding to any thing of a vindictive spirit on account of them, but rendering to them, under all circumstances, good for evil, and committing ourselves entirely to the disposal of an all-wise God^k. In a word, "the same mind must be in us as was in him," under every possible situation and circumstance of life^l: and then, as "he pleased the Father always," so shall we infallibly be approved by him in the whole of our conversation^m.]

The Apostle, appealing to them that he had so taught them, exhorts them to press forward in the course he had pointed out. Let us proceed then to consider,

II. The exhortation—

In this he acknowledges, that they had already done well: but he wishes them to redouble their exertions in their heavenly way. Let us notice here,

1. The fact conceded—

[When he says, "Ye have received of us," he does not mean merely that they had *heard* his instructions, but that

^d Jer. xxiii. 6.

^e John i. 16.

^f 1 Cor. i. 30.

^g Gal. ii. 20.

^h Isai. xlv. 24, 25.

ⁱ 1 John ii. 6.

^k 1 Pet. ii. 21—23.

^l Phil. ii. 5.

^m Rom. xii. 2.

they had so heard them as to be *influenced by* them. It was at all times a delight to the Apostle to acknowledge the good that was in his converts, and to bestow commendation on them as far as it was due. And it is with unfeigned joy, that we can make the same acknowledgment respecting those to whom we have ministered, We bless God that many have been brought to live by faith upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and “so to walk as they have him for an ensampleⁿ :” and it is our earnest desire and prayer to God, that our ministrations may produce the same blessed effect on all. But whatever advances you may have made in the divine life, we must call your attention to,]

2. The duty urged—

[Paul would not that any one of his converts should faint or be weary in well-doing. “The path of the just is like that of the sun,” which advances without intermission to its meridian height and splendour^o. Having begun to run well, we must continue; yea, like racers in a course, we must forget that which is behind, and press forward with ever-increasing ardour to that which is before, exerting ourselves the more, the nearer we approach the goal^p. Behold then our duty: Have we begun to “walk *in* Christ Jesus?” let us live more entirely upon him every day we live. Let us resemble the branch of a vine, which incessantly derives its sap and nourishment from the stock, and derives it only in order to its more abundant production of the choicest fruit^q. Have we begun to “walk *after* Christ?” let us seek a more entire conformity to his image, yea, a perfect transformation into it “from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord^r.” We must know no bounds, no limits to our exertions: we must seek to “grow up into him in all things,” to attain “the full measure of his stature^s,” to be “holy as he is holy,” and “perfect as he is perfect.”]

The affectionate and earnest manner in which the Apostle urges this duty upon them, will furnish us with an important and appropriate CONCLUSION—

He might well have enjoined these things in an authoritative manner; but “for love’s sake he rather besought them^t.” But what an argument did he use!

ⁿ Of course, a congregation should be well known before such concessions are made. They come best from a stated pastor, who is well acquainted with their spiritual condition.

^o Prov. iv. 18.

^p Phil. iii. 13, 14.

^q John xv. 4, 5.

^r 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^s Eph. iv. 13, 15.

^t Philem. ver. 8, 9.

“ I exhort you by the Lord Jesus !” By this sacred name I would also beseech you, beloved brethren : I would entreat you,

1. By the consideration of *all that he has done and suffered for you*—

[Can you reflect on the humiliation, the labours, the sufferings to which he submitted for you, and not long to requite him to the utmost of your power? He never assigned any bounds to his love, and will you fix any bounds to yours? He never ceased from his work, till he could say, “ It is finished :” and will you stop short in yours? O brethren, “ this is our wish, even your perfection^u.” Let the same be your wish, your labour, your continual pursuit.]

2. By the consideration of *all the interest that he yet takes in your welfare*—

[Night and day is he occupied in promoting the salvation of your souls. Though seated on his Father’s throne, and partaking of all his Father’s glory, he is not forgetful of you. On the contrary, he is making continual intercession for you, and administering the affairs of the whole creation for your good. Does he see you deviating in any respect from the path which he trod? “ Father,” he cries, “ forgive them, and lay not this sin to their charge.” Does he see the powers of darkness striving to ensnare you? He sends a host of angels to your aid, that they may “ minister unto you,” and “ hold you up in their hands, that you dash not your foot against a stone.” Does he see you ready to faint in your spiritual course? “ Go,” says he, “ go, my Spirit, strengthen the hands, and encourage the heart, of that drooping saint :” “ Take of the things that are mine, and shew them unto him :” “ glorify me before him :” and “ fulfil in him all my good pleasure.”

Now then, when the Saviour thus cares for you, will you intermit your care for him? When he is thus managing your concerns, will you not with increasing confidence commit them to his care? When he is doing every thing that can possibly be done for you, will you leave any thing undone that can be done for him?]

3. By the consideration of *the honour he will derive from you*—

[He himself tells us, that “ his Father is glorified in our fruitfulness^x.” And St. Paul speaks of Christ also as magnified in his body, whether by life or death^y. What a thought

^u 2 Cor. xiii. 9.

^x John xv. 8.

^y Phil. i. 20.

is this! Can you, my brethren, glorify the Father, and magnify the Lord Jesus, and will you not strive to do it? Know assuredly, that “your professed subjection to the Gospel of Christ” does cause him to be exceedingly magnified: and the more “the exceeding grace of God” appears in you, the more of praises and adoration and thanksgiving will abound to him^z. Let this blessed prospect animate your souls: and whereinssoever you have hitherto glorified him, seek to “abound more and more.”]

4. By the consideration of *the glory that will accrue to him in the day of judgment*—

[In that great day the Lord Jesus “Christ will be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe^a.” The brighter his image shone upon them here, the more radiance will appear around them there; and all will be as jewels to compose his crown^b. When the demoniac had confessed his inability to withstand the Lord Jesus, and yet had prevailed over seven men who attempted to cast out the evil spirit, we are told that “the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified^c.” How then will it be magnified, when the extent of his power in you shall be seen, and your once dark polluted souls shall shine forth as the sun in the firmament for ever and ever! Now then is the time for you to exalt his name, and to augment his glory to all eternity. It is but a little time that you will be able to do any thing for him: when death comes, all your opportunities to advance his glory will cease for ever. Up then, and be doing. We have shewn you how to walk and to please God, and you have begun the blessed work: but O, we entreat you to abound more and more! And may “the God of peace, who brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ: to whom be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen^d.”]

^z 2 Cor. ix. 13, 14.

^a 2 Thess. i. 10.

^b Mal. iii. 17.

^c Acts xix. 17.

^d Heb. xiii. 20, 21.

MMCCII.

THE RESURRECTION.

1 Thess. iv. 13—18. *I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For, if we believe*

that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

IT is justly said by the Apostle, that “godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come.” Certainly true religion doubles our joys, at the same time that it greatly diminishes our sorrows. Whatever temporal happiness a man of God enjoys, he has, by anticipation, the joys of eternity also added to it; whilst his griefs, whatever they may be, are also proportionably mitigated by the consideration of their transitory nature, their sanctifying efficacy, and their glorious issue. This St. Paul intimates in the passage before us. There were some of the Thessalonian Church who had given way to sorrow in an unbecoming manner; so that, in that respect, they could scarcely be discerned as differing from the unconverted heathen around them. To correct this, he tells them of the glorious prospects which they have in the eternal world, and begs them to look forward to their future destinies, as the means of tranquillizing their minds under all the painful circumstances which might at any time occur.

In the words which we have just read, he declares,

I. The certainty of the resurrection—

The heathen quite derided the idea of the resurrection^a, deeming it altogether incredible^b: and some who professed Christianity explained away the doctrine relating to it, and represented the resurrection as a merely spiritual change, which had passed already^c. Even some of the Thessalonian Church

^a Acts xvii. 18, 32.

^b Acts xxvi. 8.

^c 2 Tim. ii. 18.

did not appear to be well grounded in it: and therefore St. Paul assured them, that it was a doctrine on which they might fully depend.

They did believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—

[On these two facts all Christianity was founded, namely, that “Jesus had died for our sins, and had risen again for our justification^d.” If Jesus had not risen, all their faith in him, and all their hope from him, was altogether vain^e — — —]

These facts admitted, the resurrection of man would follow of course—

[The resurrection of our blessed Lord was both *an evidence that God can* raise the dead, and *a pledge that he will*. The same power that could raise him, can raise us: nothing less than Omnipotence was necessary for the one; and to Omnipotence the other also must yield. Had Jesus risen merely as an individual, we might have supposed it possible that the power exerted in his behalf would not be exercised for us. But he rose as the federal Head of his people: and what has been done for him, the Head, shall also be done for all his members. He is “the first-fruits of them that sleep.” Now the first-fruits sanctified and assured the whole harvest. We may be sure therefore, that, as “our Forerunner” is gone before, we shall all follow him in due season^f. The one gives us a full assurance of the other^g.]

For their fuller instruction, he proceeds to state to them,

II. The order in which it shall be effected—

This perhaps is a matter of curiosity, rather than of any great practical importance: but Paul would not that the Thessalonian Christians should be ignorant of it; and therefore it is not undeserving of *our* attention. The resurrection then will take place in this order:—

First, the dead will be raised from their graves—

[All that have ever departed out of the world will be restored to life, each clothed in his own proper body. The sea and the grave will yield up those who have long since been

^d Rom. iv. 25.

^e 1 Cor. xv. 13—18.

^f 1 Cor. xv. 20, 23. with John xiv. 2, 3. and Heb. vi. 20.

^g Acts xvii. 31.

entombed within them, and they shall all live again upon the earth^h. The text indeed speaks of the righteous only, who had fallen asleep in Christ: but in other passages we are informed that the ungodly also will hear the voice of the Son of God, and, in obedience to it, come forth from their gravesⁱ. Irresistible will be the summons, when “the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God,” shall sound. When Jesus came in his state of humiliation, thousands withstood his voice: but none will, “when he shall come in his own glory, and the glory of his Father, with his holy angels.” The great and mighty, as well as the mean and insignificant, shall come forth alike, each re-united to his kindred body, and each appearing in his own proper character.]

Next, those who remain alive upon the earth will be changed—

[Certainly those who are on the earth will not be changed *first*; and it appears, that they will remain unchanged, whilst all who have ever died are restored to life. What a surprising sight will it be, to behold such countless multitudes of the children of Adam bursting forth from their graves, and standing up, an innumerable host, in their incorruptible and glorified bodies! — — — But, this once effected, the people who are then living upon earth will be changed in an instant, their mortal and corruptible bodies becoming at once, and without any dissolution preparatory to it, incorruptible and immortal. This is the order which St. Paul has specified also in another epistle: first the trumpet, then the rising of the dead, and then the change of the living^k. Well may the Apostle call it a “mystery^l.” But as all will then be in that form which they will bear to all eternity, what an amazing difference will then appear in those who once perfectly resembled each other! the godly how beautiful! the ungodly, how deformed! both having either heaven or hell depicted in their very countenances! Amazing sight! how infinitely surpassing all human conception!]

Then will they all together be “caught up to meet the Lord in the air”—

[Yes, into the presence of their Judge must they go: and as the earth would not be a theatre sufficient for the occasion, they must meet the Lord in the air. Blessed, blessed summons to the godly! With what joy will they go forth to meet Him, whom unseen they loved, and out of whose fulness they received all the grace that ever they possessed, “their spirits

^h Rev. xx. 13.

ⁱ John v. 28, 29. Dan. xii. 2.

^k 1 Cor. xv. 51—53.

^l 1 Cor. xv. 51.

being now made perfect," and "their vile body fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body!" On the other hand, with what reluctance are the ungodly dragged into his presence! How gladly would they hide themselves from him, if it were possible. Thousands, who were once the great and noble of the earth, and who thought there was none above them to whom they owed allegiance, will now curse the day that they were born, and "cry to the rocks and mountains to cover them" from the face of their offended Lord^m.]

Having stated this, he declares,

III. The blessed issue of it to the saints—

They "shall be ever with the Lord"—

[From him they will receive a sentence of acquittal, or rather of unqualified approbation, "Well done, good and faithful servants." To his right hand will they be called, as a prelude to the honour he is about to confer upon them. The judgment finished, he ascends with all his bright attendants to the heaven of heavens, the immediate residence of the Deity; and these his redeemed people now ascend together with him, to behold his glory in all its unclouded splendourⁿ, and to participate his throne, even as he participates his Father's throne^o. O what fulness of joy do they now possess^p! How bright their vision of his glory! how unbounded their fruition of his love! Nothing now could add to their felicity; nor can any thing now detract from it^q. That too which constitutes its chief ingredient is, that it will be "for ever." Were this happiness to be only for a fixed period, however long, it would not be complete: the idea of its ultimate termination would rob it of half its value. But it will be pure and endless as the Deity himself.]

But how different the condition of the ungodly!

[They will be bidden to "depart *from him*; to depart accursed; to depart into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." Alas! alas! what weeping, what wailing, what gnashing of teeth will they experience; and that also for ever and ever! Unhappy creatures! "Good were it for them, that they had never been born."]

He further suggests,

IV. The improvement that should be made of this subject—

^m Rev. vi. 14—17.

ⁿ John xvii. 24.

^o Rev. iii. 21.

^p Ps. xvi. 11.

^q Rev. vii. 14—17. and xxii. 3—5.

The word translated “comfort,” is in the margin rendered “exhort.” Either sense of the word is just; and therefore we will include both. This subject then should be improved by us,

1. In a way of mutual consolation—

[Have any of us been bereaved of dear and pious friends? “Let us not sorrow, as those who have no hope.” What though they shall not come again to us? it is but a little time, and we shall go to them: and most blessed shall be our meeting at the right hand of God — — — Are we terrified at the thoughts of our own approaching dissolution? It is but “a sleep,” if we belong to Jesus; it is a falling asleep in the Saviour’s arms. What is there terrific in this? O put away your unbelieving fears; and learn to number death amongst your richest treasures^r — — —]

2. In a way of mutual exhortation—

[Certainly the thoughts of a resurrection and a future judgment ought to fill us with holy awe: for the consequences of that judgment are such as no words can adequately express, nor any finite intelligence fully comprehend. We then would exhort every one of you, and do ye also exhort one another, in the words of the prophet, “Prepare to meet thy God.” Remember the blessedness “that is here spoken of, is to *those only who die in the Lord*:” and, if you would die in the Lord, you must *live in the Lord*: you must be in him, as the branch in the vine, by a living faith; and you must abide in him to your dying hour. Seek then “to be found in him, not having your own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in him.” Then may you look forward to death as to a transient sleep, from which you shall awake in the morning of the resurrection, to everlasting blessedness and glory.]

^r 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.

MMCCIII.

WATCHFULNESS ENJOINED.

1 Thess. v. 1—8. *Of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon*

a woman with child, and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breast-plate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

ON an occasion like the present, when God is so loudly speaking to us by his providence, I am anxious that his voice, and his alone, should be heard amongst us: for as, on the one hand, it would be peculiarly difficult so to speak, as to cut off all occasion for misconception, so, on the other hand, filled as your minds are with holy fear and reverence, it will be far more grateful to you to sit, as it were, at the feet of Jesus, and to hear what the Lord God himself shall say concerning you^a. Methinks, in the spirit of your minds you are all, even this whole congregation, like Cornelius and his company, saying, “Now are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God:” yes, I would hope that each individual is now in the posture of Samuel, “Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.” To meet these devout wishes in a suitable manner, I have chosen a portion of Scripture, which contains all that the occasion calls for, and bears the impress of Divine authority in every part. It comes home to our business and bosoms: it turns our minds from the distinguished individual whose loss we deplore, and fixes them on our own personal concerns; proclaiming to every one of us, “Prepare to meet thy God.”

The point to which it more immediately calls our attention, is, the coming of our Lord to judgment. The precise period when that awful event shall take place has never been revealed either to men or angels:

^a Preached before the University of Cambridge, on occasion of the death of the Rev. Dr. Jowett, Regius Professor of Civil Law; Nov. 21, 1813.

it is "a secret which the Father has reserved in his own bosom." This only we know concerning it, that it will come suddenly and unexpected to all them that dwell on the earth: and therefore it is our wisdom to be always standing prepared for it. We believe indeed that it is yet far distant from us, because there are many prophecies which yet remain to be accomplished previous to its arrival: but to us the day of death is as the day of judgment; because as death finds us, so shall we appear at the bar of judgment; and "as the tree falleth, so will it lie" to all eternity. We shall therefore speak of death and judgment as, in effect, the same to us; and we shall notice in succession,

I. The uncertainty of the period when death shall arrive—

II. The character of those who are prepared for it—

III. The duty of all in reference to it—

I. As to the uncertainty of the period when death and judgment shall arrive, the idea is so familiar to our minds, and the truth of it so self-evident, that, as the Apostle intimates, ye have no need to have it brought before you. Yet though universally acknowledged as a truth, how rarely is it felt as a ground of action in reference to the eternal world! We look into the Holy Scriptures, and there we see this truth written as with a sun-beam. We behold the whole human race surprised at the deluge in the midst of all their worldly cares and pleasures; and all, except one little family, swept away by one common destruction. A similar judgment we behold executed on the cities of the plain: and these particular judgments are held forth to us as warnings of what we ourselves have reason to expect. Our blessed Lord says to us, "Be ye also ready; for in an hour that ye think not the Son of Man cometh:" yet we cannot realize the thought, that death should ever so overtake us. Nay, we even try to put the conviction far from us, and, in every instance of sudden death that we hear

of, endeavour to find some reason for the mortality of our neighbour, which does not attach to ourselves. When, as in the instance now before us, a person is snatched away suddenly, and in full health, as it were, we are constrained for a moment to reflect, that we also are liable to be called away : but it is surprising how soon the thought vanishes from our minds, and how little permanent effect remains. We are told, that our danger is in reality increased by our security ; and that we are then most of all exposed to the stroke of death, when we are most dreaming of “ peace and safety ;” yet we cannot awake from our torpor, or set ourselves to prepare for death and judgment. We are not altogether unconscious, that destruction, even inevitable and irremediable destruction, must be the portion of those who are taken unprepared ; and yet we defer our preparation for eternity, in the hope of finding some more convenient season. We see our neighbour surprised as by “ a thief in the night ;” and yet we hope that notice will be given to us. We even bear about in our persons some disorders or infirmities which might warn us of our approaching end ; and yet we look for another and another day, till like a woman in travail, we are unexpectedly seized, and with great anguish of mind are constrained to obey the call.

Now whence is it, that notwithstanding “ we know perfectly” the uncertainty of life, we are so little affected with the consideration of it ? If there were no future state of existence, we might account for it ; because men would naturally put away from them any thoughts, which might diminish their enjoyment of present good. But when this life is only a space afforded us to prepare for a better, and when an eternity of happiness or misery depends on our improvement of the present hour, it is truly amazing that we should be able to indulge so fatal a security. One would think that every one would be employing all the time that he could redeem from the necessary duties of life, in order to provide for his eternal state :

one would think that he should scarcely give sleep to his eyes or slumber to his eye-lids, till he had obtained a clear evidence of his acceptance with God, and had "made his calling and election sure." But this is not the case: and therefore, evident as the truth is, we need to have it brought before us, and enforced on our minds and consciences by every argument that can be adduced.

Permit me then to remind those who are living in open sins, that they know not how soon they may be called into the presence of their God, with all their sins upon them. And how will they endure the sight of their offended God? Will they, when standing at his tribunal, make as light of sin as they now do? Will they prevail on him to view it as mere youthful indiscretion, and unworthy of any serious notice? No, in truth: if any could come to us from the dead, they would not designate their crimes by such specious terms as they once used respecting them; but would tell us plainly, that "they who do such things cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Think then, ye who make a mock at sin, how soon your voice may be changed, and all your present sport be turned to "weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth!"

Nor is it to open sinners only that we must suggest these thoughts: we must remind the moral also, and the sober, that death may quickly terminate their day of grace: yes, we must "put *them* in remembrance of these things, though they know them, and be established" in the belief of them. We mean not to undervalue sobriety and outward morality: no; we rejoice to see even an external conformity to Christian duties. But more than outward morality is wanting for our final acceptance with God. We must have a penitent and contrite spirit: we must seek refuge in Christ from all the curses of the broken law: we must be renewed in the spirit of our mind by the sanctifying influences of the Holy Ghost: we must be brought to live no longer to ourselves, but unto Him who died for us, and rose again. These things are absolutely and indispensably necessary to our

salvation: the form of godliness, how far soever it may carry us, will profit us nothing at the bar of judgment, if we possess not the power of it. How awful then is the thought, that, in a few days or weeks, those persons who are most respected and revered amongst us for their wisdom and learning, for their probity and honour, may be called to give up their account to God, before they have attained that vital godliness which must constitute their meetness for heaven!

But indeed the uncertainty of life speaks loudly to the best of men; it bids them to “stand upon their watch-tower,” and be ready at every moment to meet their last enemy: for, as mere morality will profit little without real piety, so the lamp of outward profession will be of no service, if it be destitute of that oil which God alone can bestow.

It is a matter of consolation to us, however, that some are prepared for death, however suddenly it may come.

II. Who they are, and what their character is, we now come to shew—

The Scriptures every where draw a broad line of distinction between the true servants of Christ, and those who are such only in name and profession. Thus, in the words before us, they are called “Children of the light and of the day,” in opposition to those who are “of the night and of darkness.” Doubtless this distinction primarily referred to their having been brought out of the darkness of heathen superstitions, into the marvellous light of the Gospel of Christ. But we must not suppose that it is to be limited to this. The ways of sin and ignorance are justly denominated darkness, no less than idolatry itself: and the paths of faith and holiness may be called “light,” whether we have been brought into them suddenly from a state of heathenism, or gradually, under a profession of Christianity itself. Now of the Thessalonians he could say, in the judgment of charity, that “they *all* were children of the light

and of the day." The state of profession was very different then from what it is at this time: people did not embrace Christianity unless they had been strongly convinced of its truth; and the moment they did embrace it, they strove to "walk worthy of their high calling," and to stimulate each other to "adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things." The persecutions they suffered obliged them to have constant recourse to God in prayer for his support; and to watch carefully over their own conduct, that they might not give any just "occasion to their adversaries to speak reproachfully." Hence their religion was vital and practical, and very different from that which obtains among the professors of Christianity at this day. Now men are reputed Christians, though they have their affections altogether set upon the world, and their habits differing but little from those of heathens. A man may be a Christian, though he drink, and swear, and commit evils, which ought scarcely to be so much as named amongst us. A man may be a Christian, though he have no real love to Christ, no sweet communion with him, no holy glorying in his cross and passion. But "ye have not so learned Christ, if so be ye have heard him, and been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus." The distinction between light and darkness is the same as ever: and those only who walk according to the example of the primitive Christians, can be called "the children of the light and of the day." But those, whoever they be, are prepared for death: to them, though it may come suddenly, it cannot come unlooked for: it "cannot overtake them as a thief."

And such was that exalted character, whom it has pleased our God so suddenly to take from the midst of us. In whatever light we view him, he was a bright and consistent character, an ornament to his profession, an honour to his God. It is the peculiar excellence of religion, that it operates in every department of human life, and stimulates to an exemplary discharge of every duty. It is superfluous for

me to mention, with what unwearied diligence, and distinguished ability, he filled the high office which had been assigned him in this university; and how uniform have been his exertions, for upwards of thirty years, for the advancement of learning, the maintenance of order, and the due regulation of all the complicated concerns of the university at large. Long, long will his loss be felt, in every department which he had been called to fill. To him every one looked, as his most judicious friend, in cases of difficulty; assured that, whilst by his comprehensive knowledge he was well qualified to advise, he was warped by no prejudices, nor biassed by any interests: he ever both advised, and did, what he verily believed to be right in the sight of God. His superiority to all worldly considerations was strongly marked throughout the whole course of his life; more indeed to *his* honour, than the honour of those, by whom such eminent talents and such transcendent worth have for so long a period been overlooked.

Had these excellencies arisen only from worldly principles, though they would have shed a lustre over his character, and conferred benefits on the body of which he was a member,—they would have availed little as a preparation for death and judgment. But they were the fruits of true religion in his soul. He had been brought out of the darkness of a natural state, and had been greatly enriched with divine knowledge. He was indeed “mighty in the Scriptures;” his views of divine truth were deep, and just, and accurate; and, above all, they were influential on the whole of his life and conduct. He not only beheld Christ as the Saviour of the world, but relied on him as his only hope, and cleaved to him with full purpose of heart, and gloried in him as his Lord, his God, and his whole salvation. Nor was he satisfied with serving God in his closet: no; he confessed his Saviour openly; he was a friend and patron of religion, he encouraged it in all around him; he was not ashamed of Christ, nor of any of

his faithful followers. He accounted it no degradation to shew in every way his attachment to the Gospel, and his full conviction that there is salvation in no other name under heaven than the name of Jesus Christ. He was, in the highest sense of the word, "a child of light:" and verily he caused "his light so to shine before men," that all who beheld it were constrained to glorify God in his behalf.

To him then death came not as a thief in the night. Though it came suddenly, so suddenly that he had not the smallest apprehension of its approach, it found him not unprepared. His loins were girt, his lamp was trimmed, and he entered, a welcome guest, to the marriage-supper of his Lord.

O that we all might be found equally prepared, when the summons from on high shall be sent to us! O that we may have in our souls an evidence, that we also are "children of the light and of the day!" Happy indeed would it be, if the state of religion amongst us were such, that we might adopt with truth the charitable expression in our text, "*Ye all are children of the light and of the day.*" But if we cannot do this, we have at least reason to be thankful, that real piety is certainly more prevalent amongst us than it was some years ago; that prejudices against it have most astonishingly subsided; and that, where it does not yet reign, its excellence is secretly acknowledged; so that on this occasion we may doubt whether there be so much as one amongst us, who does not say in his heart, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

Let me then proceed,

III. To point out the duty of all, in reference to that day—

We should "not sleep as do others." Those who put the evil day far from them, can live unmindful of their God, and regardless of the sentence that he shall pass upon them. They can go on dreaming of heaven and happiness in the eternal world, though

they never walk in the way thither, or seek to obtain favour with their offended God. But let it not be thus with any who desire happiness beyond the grave. If ever we would behold the face of God in peace, we must improve our present hours in turning to him, and in labouring to perform his will. If the prize held out to those who wrestled, or ran, or fought, could not be obtained without the most strenuous exertions, much less can the glory of heaven be obtained, unless the acquisition of it be the great object of our lives. It is true indeed that “the Son of Man must give unto us the meat that endureth to everlasting life;” but still we must “labour for it” with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength. To expect the end without using the means, is to reverse the decrees of heaven, and to deceive ourselves to our eternal ruin. We must “watch and be sober.” It is an inordinate attachment to earthly things that keeps us from the pursuit of heavenly things. The cares, the pleasures, the honours of this life, engross all our attention, and leave us neither time nor inclination for higher objects. This grovelling disposition we must resist and mortify. We must set our affections on things above, and not on things on the earth; and must not only keep heaven constantly in view, but must so run as to obtain the prize. The men of this world affect darkness rather than light, as being more suited to the habits in which they delight to live. “They that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that be drunken, (if not lost to all sense of shame,) are drunken in the night:” but we, if indeed we are of the day, shall delight to “come forth to the light, that our deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God.” We should study the Holy Scriptures, not merely to acquire a critical knowledge of them, (though that is good and necessary in its place;) but to find what is the will of God, and what is that way in which he has commanded us to walk: and instead of being satisfied with doing what shall satisfy the demands of an accusing conscience,

we must aspire after a perfect conformity to the Divine image, and endeavour to “walk in all things even as Christ himself walked.”

But our duty is described in our text under some peculiar images, to which we shall do well to advert. We are supposed to be as sentinels, watching against the incursions of our spiritual foe. For our protection, armour of heavenly temper has been provided : “for a breast-plate, we are to put on faith and love ; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.” We might, if it were needful, mark the suitableness of these various graces to the protection of the part which they are intended to defend. But as this would lead us rather from our main subject, we content ourselves with a general view of these graces, as necessary for the final attainment of everlasting salvation. We must put on *faith*, without which indeed we are exposed to the assault of every enemy, and destitute of any means of defence whatever. It is in Christ only that we have the smallest hope of acceptance with God ; and in him alone have we those treasures of grace and strength which are necessary for a successful prosecution of our spiritual warfare : “He is made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” But how must we obtain these things from him ? It is by faith, and by faith only that we can “receive them out of his fulness.” This then is the first grace which we must cultivate ; for according to our faith all other things will be unto us. To him we must look continually ; renouncing every other confidence, and trusting altogether in him alone. In the fountain of his precious blood we must wash our guilty souls, or, as the Scripture expresses it, “Our garments must be made white in the blood of the Lamb.” To him, under every conflict, we must cry for strength ; for it is his grace alone that can be sufficient for us ; and “through his strength communicated to us, we shall be able to do all things.” Yet, notwithstanding all our exertions, we shall find that in many things we daily offend ; and therefore, under every fresh contracted guilt, we must look to

Him who is “our Advocate with the Father, and the propitiation for our sins.” Hence it is that all our peace must flow ; and hence we shall find a satisfactory answer to the accusations of every enemy : “Who is he that condemneth ? It is Christ that died ; yea rather, that is risen again, who also maketh intercession for us.”

But together with this we must cultivate love ; which indeed is the inseparable fruit of faith ; for “faith worketh by love.” Whether we understand “love” as having God or man for its object, or as comprehending both, it is a good defence against our spiritual enemies. For, if we truly love our God, who shall prevail upon us to offend him ? If we “love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity,” “who shall separate us from him ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword ? No ; in all these things we shall be more than conquerors through Him that loved us.” And if we love our fellow-creatures as ourselves, we shall strive to benefit them to the utmost of our power ; and account no sacrifice great, which may contribute to their welfare : we shall be ready to “suffer all things for the elect’s sake,” and even to “lay down our lives for the brethren.”

Behold then, what a defence is here against the darts of our enemies ! Who shall be able to pierce our breast, when so protected ? We may defy all the confederate armies of earth and hell : “for I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

For the protection of our head there is an helmet provided, even “the hope of salvation.” Let a man have been “begotten to a lively hope in Christ Jesus, to a hope of that inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us,” and will he barter it away for the things of time and sense ? or will he suffer his views

of heaven to be clouded by the indulgence of any unhallowed lusts? No; he will contend with every enemy of his soul: he will "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts:" he will "lay aside every weight, and the sins that most easily beset him, and will run with patience the race that is set before him, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of his faith." Instead of forgetting the great day of the Lord, he will be "looking for, and hasting unto, the coming of the day of Christ." Though willing to live for the good of others, he will "desire rather for himself to depart, that he may be with Christ, which is far better" than any enjoyment that can be found on earth. "Not that he will desire so much to be unclothed," because of any present troubles, as to "be clothed upon, that mortality may be swallowed up of life."

This armour then must be procured; this armour must be worn; and, clothed in it, we must watch against all our enemies.

And though others sleep, yet must not we: yea, if all around us should be drowned in sleep, yet must not we give way to slumber: if to be sober and vigilant must of necessity make us singular, we must dare to be singular, even as Elijah in the midst of Israel, or as Noah in the antediluvian world. If it be true that none but those who are children of the light and of the day are ready for death and judgment, let us come forth to the light without delay, and endeavour to walk in the light, even as God himself is in the light. His word is light: it shews us in all things how to walk and to please him: it sets before us examples also, in following whom we shall by faith and patience inherit the promises, as they now do. Let this word then be taken as a light to our feet, and a lantern to our paths: and let us follow it in all things, as those that would approve themselves to the heart-searching God. Let us not listen to any vain excuses for delay. We see, in the instance before us, how suddenly we may be called away, and how soon our day of grace may come to

a close. And how terrible will it be, if that day should overtake us as a thief! Let us be wise: I beseech you all, by the tender mercies of God, to have compassion on your own souls, and to “work while it is day, knowing that the night cometh wherein no man can work.”

MMCCIV.

THE DUTIES OF MODERATION AND WATCHFULNESS.

1 Thess. v. 8. *Let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breast-plate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.*

THE exact season of the day of judgment is wisely hid from our eyes. If it were revealed to us, there is no reason to think that we should make a right improvement of that knowledge. The uncertainty of its arrival is far better calculated to excite our diligence in religious duties, because, while we are told that it will come as surely, as irresistibly, and as unexpectedly too, as a thief in the night, or as travail upon a woman with child, we see the necessity of continual watchfulness and preparation for it. The world at large indeed will rest in supineness and security, in spite of every warning that is given them: but they who profess to fear God should manifest a different spirit, and, as persons apprised of their danger, should ever stand upon their guard. To this effect the Apostle exhorts us in the text; in discoursing on which we shall consider,

I. The description given of believers—

The careless world are in a state of intellectual and moral darkness—

[The light of divine truth has not shined into their hearts, nor have the clouds of nature's darkness been dispelled. “They call evil good, and good evil; and put darkness for light, and light for darkness^a.” Their lives too abound with

^a Isai. v. 20.

deeds of darkness; “nor will they come to the light, lest their deeds should be reprov’d.”]

As contrasted with them, believers “are of the day”—

[They have been “brought out of darkness into the marvellous light” of the Gospel, and are enabled to “discern between good and evil.” Their dispositions also are changed, so that they desire to “walk in the light, even as God is in the light;” and they “come to the light, that their deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.” They see indeed much in themselves for which they have reason to be ashamed: but they would gladly attain to such purity of heart, that their inmost thoughts and principles, no less than their actions, should bear the minutest inspection of all their fellow-creatures.]

But that they are prone to relapse into their former state, is strongly intimated in,

II. The exhortation addressed to them—

The children of darkness are represented in the preceding context as addicted to sloth and intemperance^b; in opposition to which vices, believers are exhorted to “be sober,” that is, to exercise,

1. Moderation—

[They who know not the vanity of earthly things may reasonably be expected to run to excess in their attachment to them, and their anxiety about them. But it ill becomes those who have been enlightened by the Spirit of God, to set their hearts upon such empty, unsatisfying, transient enjoyments. God would have *them* to “be without carefulness,” like “the birds of the air, that neither sow nor gather into barns.” He expects them to “set their affections rather on things above,” and to put forth the energy of their minds in the pursuit of objects worthy the attention of an immortal spirit. And though they may both rejoice and weep on account of present occurrences, yet they should “rejoice as though they rejoiced not, and weep as though they wept not, because the fashion of this world passeth away^c.”]

2. Vigilance—

[Others yield to sloth, because they see no occasion for activity: but believers know what numerous and mighty enemies they have to contend with: they see too, how short and uncertain their time is for accomplishing the work which God has given them to do: and of what infinite importance it

^b ver. 7.

^c 1 Cor. vii. 29—31.

is that, whenever called to appear before God, they should be able to give a good account of their stewardship: surely then *they* can find no time to loiter. They should rather exert themselves with all diligence; and, "whatsoever their hand findeth to do, they should do it with all their might."]

This exhortation is at once illustrated and enforced by,

III. The particular direction with which it is accompanied—

Believers, whatever they may have attained, are yet in a state of warfare—

[Their enemies, though often vanquished, are still ready to return to the charge: nor will they fail to take advantage of any unwatchfulness on our part: they know the places where we are most open to assault; nor have we any security against them but by guarding every pass, and standing continually on our watch-tower. Without such precautions the strongest would be overcome, and the most victorious be reduced to a miserable captivity.]

There is, however, armour, whereby they may become invincible—

[Faith, hope, and love, are the principal graces of the Christian; and, while he keeps them in exercise, they are as armour to his soul. Faith sees the things that are invisible, as though they were present to the bodily eyes: love fixes our hearts upon them: and hope both appropriates them to ourselves, and enables us to anticipate the enjoyment of them. Having these for our helmet and our breast-plate, our head and heart are secured. In vain does Satan suggest, that there is nothing beyond this present world, or nothing better than what he offers us, or that, if there be, we at least have no part in it. These fiery darts are instantly repelled; and we determine to continue our conflicts with him, till he is bruised under our feet.]

This armour therefore every believer must put on—

[In vain shall we hope to maintain our moderation and watchfulness, if we be not clothed with this divine panoply. Every day must we put it on afresh; or rather we must rest on our arms day and night. Nor must we use it only in the hour of conflict: we must, like good soldiers, habituate ourselves, to the use of it, even when we are not sensible of immediate danger, in order that, when called to defend ourselves, we may be expert and successful in the contest. We must be careful too that we never separate these pieces of armour; for,

whether our head or heart were unprotected, our vigilant enemy would assuredly seize his opportunity to inflict a deadly wound. It is on the union of our graces that our safety depends. Whether we lay aside our faith, our love, or our hope, we are equally in danger. Let us then put them on daily, and preserve them in continual exercise, that we may fight a good fight, and be "more than conquerors through him that loved us."]

This SUBJECT being altogether addressed to those who "are of the day," we need only add a few words to those who "are of the night"—

[The warning given them in the context is well worthy of their deep attention. It is said, that "the day of the Lord shall overtake them as a thief in the night." They lie down in security, concluding that, because the ruffian has not hitherto disturbed their midnight slumbers, he never will: but at last he comes upon them to their terror, and spoils them to their confusion. Thus will the day of judgment, or, which is the same to them, the day of death, come upon the ungodly; and they will lose their souls, which it should have been their daily labour to secure. Even believers need to be exhorted to sobriety, and must be vanquished, if they follow not the directions given them: what then must the unbeliever do, if he continue in his supineness? What hope can there be for *him*? Let all arise from their slumbers, and arm themselves for the battle. "It is high time for all of us to awake out of sleep: let us therefore put off the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light:" and let us war a good warfare, till "death itself is swallowed up in victory."]

MMCCV.

THE NATURE OF TRUE RELIGION.

1 Thess. v. 16—18. *Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*

THE just union of personal and relative duties is the brightest ornament of the Christian profession. The discharge of either will be imperfect, if it be not united with an attention to the other. As beauty in the human body consists not in the exquisite formation of any single feature, but in the just symmetry and configuration of the whole frame, so the perfection of a Christian character consists not in an exclusive

attention to any one duty, but in a due regard to all duties, civil and religious, social and personal.

St. Paul has been giving directions respecting the duties we owe to each other as a Christian society^a. He now descends from the social to the personal duties; stating at the same time both the grounds on which they stand, and the indispensable necessity of attending to them.

Taking his directions in a comprehensive and united view, we learn that religion is,

I. A spiritual service—

[Many, like the Pharisees of old, suppose it consists in a formal attendance on ordinances, and an external decency of conduct. But true religion is inward and spiritual. It calls forth the strongest energies of the soul. It enables a person to maintain a holy intercourse with God in secret. St. Paul himself describes it as consisting, not in outward ceremonies of any kind, but in a devotedness of heart and soul to God^b, and declares that no man can be a Christian indeed, who does not possess and manifest this elevated state of mind^c. How earnestly then should we examine whether we be thus continually waiting upon God in the exercise of prayer and praise!]

II. A rational service—

[Spiritual religion is too often deemed enthusiasm. Indeed, if we interpreted the text literally and in the strictest sense of the words, we should make religion impracticable and absurd; but, when properly explained, it enjoins nothing but what is highly reasonable. It requires us to live in the stated and devout exercise of public, social, and private prayer; and to maintain such a sense of our own unworthiness, as excites a lively gratitude for every mercy we enjoy, and stimulates to an unwearied admiration of the Divine goodness: and can any thing be more reasonable than such a state? Should not they, whose iniquities are so great, and whose wants so numerous, be frequently employed in imploring mercy and grace in the time of need? And they, who are daily loaded with benefits, be daily blessing and adoring their Benefactor? Such a service is expressly called a "*reasonable* service^d." To do otherwise were surely most unreasonable: nor are any people more irrational than they who pour contempt on these holy exercises from an affected regard for *rational religion*.]

^a ver. 14.

^c Phil. iii. 3. and Rom. ii. 28, 29.

^b Rom. xiv. 17.

^d Rom. xii. 1.

III. A delightful service—

[Many are prejudiced against spiritual religion, as though it must of necessity deprive them of all the comforts of life. Certain it is that it will rob them of all the pleasures of sin : but it will afford them infinitely richer pleasures in its stead^e. What can be more delightful than to maintain “fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ?” Can there be any melancholy arising from incessant praises and thanksgivings? Were the first converts, or the Samaritans, or the jailor, rendered melancholy by the acquisition of religion^f? Many are made melancholy by false views of religion; but none are by just and scriptural apprehensions of it. In proportion as we live in the exercise of it, we resemble the glorified saints and angels.]

Such being the nature of true religion, we will endeavour to enforce the practice of it—

[The will of God should be the law of all his creatures; and his will respecting us is fully revealed. *It is his earnest desire* that we should live in the enjoyment of himself. “He willeth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live.” *It is moreover his authoritative command* that we should love and serve him: it is his command to all, whether rich or poor, learned or unlearned. None are so high as to be exempt from this duty, nor any so situated as to be incapable of performing it. The heart may be lifted up in prayer and praise even when we are occupied in the service of the world. Let all then know God’s will respecting them. We must delight ourselves in communion with God. O let us be like-minded with our heavenly Father! Let us say, this shall be my will also. From henceforth let us “watch unto prayer and thanksgiving with all perseverance:” let us be ashamed that we have so long resisted the Divine will; and let us so live in obedience to it on earth, that we may have our portion with those who are praising him incessantly in heaven.]

^e Prov. iii. 17. This is not true of *formal*, but only of *inward* and *spiritual* religion.

^f Acts ii. 46. and viii. 8. and xvi. 34.

MMCCVI.

QUENCHING THE SPIRIT.

1 Thess. v. 19. *Quench not the Spirit.*

THERE is a harmony between all Christian graces, and a dependence of one upon another; so that none

can be exercised aright, unless all be allowed their due place and influence. There are doubtless many occasions of grief and sorrow; yet no circumstances are so afflictive, but we may find in them some ground of joy and gratitude. Hence in the directions which the Apostle gives to the Thessalonian Church, he bids them to “rejoice evermore,” and “in every thing to give thanks.” But to moderate our feelings, and to combine them in such a proportion as occasions may require, is difficult, yea, impossible, to flesh and blood. In this arduous work, we must be directed and assisted by the Spirit of God. In this connexion, the caution in the text is extremely forcible: for if we be not attentive to improve the proffered aids of the Spirit, we shall never be able to execute any other part of our Christian duty.

The words before us may have some reference to the extraordinary *gifts* of the Spirit; but being inserted amidst exhortations to various *graces*, they must be understood in reference to them also.

They contain a very solemn caution; in discoursing upon which we shall,

I. Consider the operations of the Spirit under the emblem of fire—

The Spirit is frequently spoken of under the emblem of fire^a: and fire justly represents his offices and operations—

[Kindle a fire in a dark place, and it will *give light* to all around it. Draw near to it when chilled with cold, and it will *warm and comfort you*. Cast wood or straw upon it, and it will cause them to *burst forth into a flame*. Suppose it heated to a furnace, and, if you put stones into it, it will *break and dissolve them*. Let gold or silver be submitted to its action, and it will *purge them from their dross*. Let iron be cast into it, and it will *transform the metal into its own likeness*, so that it shall come out a solid mass of fire.

Here we see the operations of the Spirit. It is his office to *enlighten* the mind^b; nor had the Apostles themselves any

^a Acts ii. 3, 4. Matt. iii. 11. Rev. iv. 5.

^b Eph. i. 17, 18.

light which they did not derive from him^c. Call upon him in a state of great dejection; and he will be your *Comforter*^d. Beg of him to reveal to you the Father's love, and the grace of Christ; and he will *in flame* your soul with love and gratitude^e. Submit your stony heart to his powerful operations; and he will *break* it in pieces, as he did in the days of old^f, and will *melt* it to contrition^g. Carry your corruptions to him to be subdued; and he will *purify* your soul from their power and defilement^h. Let him exert his full influence upon you; and he will *assimilate* you to himself, and *transform* you into the very image of your Godⁱ.]

Such being the operations of the Spirit, we shall,

II. Shew in what way we may “quench” them^k—

We may quench the Spirit in a variety of ways :

1. By resisting his operations—

[There is not any one, on whom the Spirit has not frequently exerted his influence, to bring him to repentance. But how have his motions been regarded? Have they not in many instances been resisted? Have we not plunged ourselves into business or pleasure, perhaps too into revelling and intoxication, in order to drown his voice, and silence the remonstrances of our conscience?

This then is one way in which many quench the Spirit. God has warned us, that “his Spirit shall not always strive with man^l,” and has told us how he dealt with his people of old; that “because they hearkened not to his voice and would none of him, he gave them up to their own hearts’ lusts^m.” And a similar resistance on our part will bring the same judgment upon usⁿ.]

^c 1 Cor. ii. 12.

^d John xiv. 16, 17, 26. 2 Cor. vii. 6.

^e John xvi. 14. Rom. v. 5. and xv. 13. ^f Acts ii. 37.

^g Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27. ^h Ezek. xxxvi. 25. and 1 Cor. vi. 11.

ⁱ 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^k There are passages of Scripture which seem to militate against this doctrine: see John iv. 14. and 1 John iii. 9. But give them all the force you please, they do not prove, that sin will not quench the Spirit; or, that they who live and die in sin shall not perish. And to bring them forward on such an occasion, is to weaken (and, in reference to many, to destroy) the force of the Apostle's admonition. The caution is addressed to all Christians without distinction; and therefore ought to be enforced in that extent. The very giving of the caution sufficiently shews the possibility and danger of quenching the Spirit; and therefore we should all attend to it with fear and trembling.

^l Gen. vi. 3.

^m Ps. lxxxix. 11, 12.

ⁿ Prov. i. 24—26.

2. By delaying to comply with them—

[Few, if any, are so impious as to determine that they will never turn to God. Men deceive themselves with some faint purposes of turning to God at a future period. Thus, when the Spirit “knocks at the door of their hearts^o,” they send him away, as Felix did St. Paul, with an intention to “send for him at a more convenient season.” But, as in the instance alluded to, the more convenient season never came, so it too often happens with respect to us. The Spirit is a sovereign agent, that is not at our command: he is “a wind that bloweth where he listeth:” and, if we will not spread our sails to the wind, and avail ourselves of the advantage afforded us, we may bemoan our lost opportunity when it is too late^p.]

3. By entertaining sentiments inimical to them—

[It is not uncommon for those whose consciences are awakened to a sense of their condition, to take refuge in *infidel* opinions. If they do not call in question the divine authority of the Scriptures, they doubt the veracity of God in them, and deny the certainty and duration of the punishment which he denounces against impenitent sinners. Others adopt an *antinomian* creed; and from some experience which they suppose themselves to have had of the divine life, conclude they shall never be suffered finally to perish, notwithstanding their present experience attests their hypocrisy and self-deceit. But all of these are “speaking peace to themselves when there is no peace;” and, if they be not roused from their delusions, will soon reap the bitter fruits of their folly^q.]

4. By indulging habits contrary to his mind and will—

[God abhors iniquity of every kind: nor will he dwell in any heart that is allowedly debased by sin. If then we harbour pride, envy, malice, covetousness, uncleanness, or any other secret lust, we shall provoke him to abandon us to ourselves^r: for he has said, “If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy^s.”]

Lest any of you should be inattentive to the operations of the Spirit on your hearts, we shall,

III. Enforce the caution, not to quench them—

Consider then,

1. Whom it is that you resist—

^o Rev. iii. 20.

^p Isai. lv. 6.

^q Jer. viii. 11. Deut. xxix. 19, 20.

^r Ps. lxvi. 18.

^s 1 Cor. iii. 17.

[It may appear to us to be only a friend or minister, or, at most, our own conscience, that we resist: but, whatever be the means whereby God speaks to us, the voice is his; and an opposition to the dictates of the Spirit is an opposition to God himself^t. Have we sufficiently considered *whom* we thus “provoke to become our enemy^u?”]

2. What is his design, in striving with you—

[Has God any interest of his own to serve? Will he be less happy or glorious, whether we be saved or perish? He is moved by nothing but love and pity to our souls. And all that he desires is, to enlighten, sanctify, and save us. The first impressions that he makes upon us may be painful; but they are a needful incision, in order to a perfect cure. And should we resist his love and mercy? In what light shall we view this conduct, when his gracious designs shall be fully known, and our ingratitude be contrasted with them?]

3. How awful will be our state, if we finally prevail to quench his motions—

[While he continues to strive with us, there is hope. If there be but a spark of this heavenly fire within us, the dying embers may be rekindled: but if once this fire be extinguished, there is no hope. If God has once said, “Let him alone^x,” let him live only to fill up the measure of his iniquities, and to “treasure up wrath against the day of wrath^y,” our state will be inconceivably dreadful: better would it be for us that we had never been born. And who can tell but that this very day the Spirit may depart from him never to return? Let the dread of this awaken us to a sense of our danger, and stimulate us to improve the calls and assistances we now enjoy.]

ADVICE—

1. Renounce every thing that may lead you to quench the Spirit—

[Do ungodly companions try to lull you asleep in sin? forsake them. Do earthly, sensual, and devilish affections grieve the Spirit? mortify them. Whatever it be that tends to damp this sacred fire, put it away. Better were it to lose all that we have in the world, than to have the Spirit finally taken from us.]

2. Do all that you can to stir up the sacred fire within you—

^t Acts v. 4.

^x Hos. iv. 17.

^u Isai. lxiii. 10.

^y Rom. ii. 5.

[Fire will go out, if left to itself. We are commanded to “stir it up^z.” This must be done by meditation^a, by prayer^b, by reading of the word of God^c, by attending on divine ordinances^d, and by holy and spiritual conversation^e. Watch then the motions of the Spirit, and delay not to comply with them. Let every thing serve as fuel to the flame: and, how much soever you delight in God, endeavour to abound more and more.]

^z ἀναζωπυρεῖν, 2 Tim. i. 6.

^a Ps. xxxix. 3.

^b Ps. xl. 1—3.

^c Jer. xxiii. 29. Heb. iv. 12.

^d Acts x. 33, 34.

^e Luke xxiv. 32.

MMCCVII.

INVESTIGATION OF TRUTH RECOMMENDED.

1 Thess. v. 21. *Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.*

THERE are many who, either from an indifference about truth, or from a conceit that they are already sufficiently acquainted with it, neglect the public ministration of the Gospel, and even hold it in contempt. This is extremely culpable; because the ordinances of religion are God's appointed means for carrying on his work in the souls of men. Hence we are bidden “not to despise prophesying;” and “not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is.” At the same time, we are not necessarily to give our assent to every thing we hear; for error may be proposed to us as well as truth: and therefore the Apostle gives us this advice: “Prove all things: hold fast that which is good.”

In considering the two parts of this advice, we shall take each in its order:

I. Prove all things—

Remarkable is that address of Elihu to his friends: “Hear my words, O ye wise men; and give ear unto me, ye that have knowledge: for the ear trieth words, as the mouth tasteth meat. Let us choose to us judgment: *let us know among ourselves what is*

good^a." There is much error abroad in the world ; and *that* not only harboured, but propagated also. It will be well, therefore, for us to prove, by some authorized standard,

1. Our own sentiments—

[Every man has some sentiments about religion, though in many cases they are very crude and indistinct. On any other subject, those who have never investigated the science will hold their sentiments with some measure of diffidence and distrust: but, in reference to religion, the most ignorant are often the most confident. The fall of man, the corruption of human nature, the necessity of an atonement, the influences of the Spirit, are not only questioned by many, but are rejected by them as utter "foolishness^b;" and man's sufficiency to save himself is maintained, as though it admitted not of any doubt whatever. But, whatever be our sentiments on these heads, and on others connected with them, we should bring them to the unerring standard of God's word. Our inquiry in relation to every thing should be, "What saith the Scripture?" By this must every sentiment be tried: and according to its agreement with this test must every opinion stand or fall.]

2. The sentiments of others—

[We are particularly cautioned not to "believe every spirit; but to try the spirits, whether they be of God^c." The one standard, to which every thing must be referred, is the word of God: as it is said, "To the law and to the testimony: if men speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them^d." To this our blessed Lord appealed, in confirmation of his word; "Search the Scriptures: for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me^e." And St. Paul commends the Bereans, because, when they heard *him*, they searched the Scriptures daily, to see whether his doctrines agreed with that unerring rule. If, then, our blessed Lord and his Apostles desired to be tried by that standard, I have no hesitation in saying, "Prove all things," whether delivered by *the many*, or *the great*, or *the learned*, or *the pious*, or *the authorized and commissioned*: if even an angel from heaven were to come to teach you, I would still give the same advice, and say, As God has given you a perfect standard, it becomes you to refer every thing to it, and to try every thing by it. The Church of Ephesus scrupled not to adopt this plan, in its fullest extent:

^a Job xxxiv. 2—4.

^b 1 Cor. i. 23.

^c 1 John iv. 1.

^d Isai. viii. 20.

^e John v. 39.

“Thou hast tried them which say they are Apostles, and are not; and hast found them liars^f.” And whether this, or the contrary, be the result of your examination, I say with boldness, “Try even an Apostle by the standard of God’s blessed word.”]

Having thus distinguished truth from falsehood, we must,

II. “Hold fast that which is good”—

There are many that would wrest it from us: and we must hold it fast against all assaults,

1. Of proud reason—

[Reason will presume to sit in judgment upon the truth of God. But this is not its province. Its proper office is, to judge whether the Scriptures are a revelation from God: but, when that is ascertained, faith is then to apprehend whatever God has spoken: and the highest dictate of reason is, to submit ourselves to God with the simplicity and teachableness of a little child. When, therefore, reason presumes to oppose the declarations of God, and to say, “This is an hard saying: who can hear it?” regard not its proud dictates, but “receive with meekness the written word^g,” remembering, that “what is foolishness with man may be indeed the wisdom of God,” and “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes it.”]

2. Of corrupt passion—

[This also fights against the truth of God. And no wonder: for the word of God condemns every unhallowed desire, and requires us to “crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts.” How should it be supposed that our corrupt nature should approve of a book, which enjoins us to “cut off a right hand, and to pluck out a right eye,” lest by sparing either the one or the other we plunge both body and soul into the fire of hell? It cannot be but that our self-indulgent appetites should rise against such severe dictates, and condemn them all as unreasonable and absurd. But you must not listen to such objectors, who “hate the light, and will not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reprov’d.” Our one question must be, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” and his will once known, must be the sole director of our ways.]

3. Of a menacing world—

[The world which lieth in wickedness ever did, and ever will, set itself against the self-denying doctrines of the Gospel.

^f Rev. ii. 2.

^g Jam. i. 21.

But we are not to make a sacrifice of divine truth, to please man: for “if we yet pleased men, we could not be the servants of Christ^h.” Nor are we to indulge any anxiety upon this head: for the very desire to retain “the friendship of the world” is a certain mark of enmity against Godⁱ. Whatever men may say, or whatever they may do, we must be faithful to our God, and “cleave unto him with full purpose of heart.” Having “bought the truth, you must never sell it.” “Hold fast that thou hast; and let no man take thy crown^k.”]

But, before I CONCLUDE this subject, let me shew you, in few words,

1. How to distinguish what is “good”—

[You will naturally say, in reply to what has been spoken, ‘How shall I know what is good? for those who oppose the Gospel will appeal to the word of God as confidently as those who receive it: and how am I to determine between them?’ I answer, the despisers of the Gospel manifestly wrest the word of God, and, by ingenious criticisms, pervert it, for the purpose of maintaining their own erroneous sentiments; whilst the humble believer receives it with all humility of mind: so that from their very mode of interpreting the Scriptures, you can tell, almost to a certainty, who is right. But, as a general rule, take the entire systems of both, and compare them, and see what is the proper tendency of each: and then remember, that the doctrine which humbles the sinner, exalts the Saviour, and promotes holiness, is and must be “good:” whilst every thing which has an opposite tendency carries its own evidence along with it, as erroneous and bad. This rule, in conjunction with the other, will leave you in no danger of erring, if you cry to God for the teaching of his Spirit, and rely with confidence on his heavenly guidance.]

2. How to make a just improvement of it—

[Rest not in a speculative view of truth, however good it may appear. The use of divine truth is, to enlarge the mind, and renovate the soul. Your views of the Gospel ought to raise your affections to God, and to fill you with adoring thoughts of your Lord and Saviour; and at the same time to transform you into his image. Your soul should “be delivered into it, as into a mould;” so that every one of its divine lineaments may be formed upon you. To hold it fast for any other end than this, will be to little purpose. But let it be thus improved, and it will be found good indeed: for it will free you from every thing that is corrupt and sinful, and bring you in safety to the realms of bliss.”]

^h Gal. i. 10.

ⁱ Jam. iv. 4. the Greek.

^k Rev. iii. 11.

MMCCVIII.

ABSTAINING FROM ALL APPEARANCE OF EVIL.

1 Thess. v. 22. *Abstain from all appearance of evil.*

SIN is a tremendous evil. The consequences of one single sin are beyond all our powers of thought or conception. If one only be hardened by it, who can tell where his influence may extend, or through how many generations it may be transmitted? To the individual who commits it, who shall say how much evil will accrue? The Spirit may be grieved; the conscience seared; and Satan may get an advantage that shall never be regained. Hence arises the necessity of standing at the remotest distance from evil: for if a thing be not evil, yet, if it appear to be so, it has all the effect of a positive evil to those who behold it. We should therefore “abstain even from all appearance of evil.”

In discoursing on this subject, we shall consider,

1. The injunction itself—

This may relate to,

1. The things we do—

[That which is perfectly indifferent in itself, may either appear wrong, or really be so, according to the circumstances under which it is done. The eating of things offered to idols, or the observance of certain days, were indifferent in themselves; and a person might either do or forbear these things, without improving or injuring the state of his soul^a. But if the doing or forbearing these things had any influence to ensnare the consciences of others, it was the duty of every person to pursue that line of conduct which was most inoffensive^b. St. Paul thought, that though “all things were lawful for him, all things were not expedient^c,” and therefore exercised self-denial with respect to things innocent in themselves, lest his influence should induce others, who were less acquainted with Christian liberty, to follow his example, in opposition to the suggestions of their own consciences^d. Ezra might have asked a guard to protect him through the desert^e;

^a 1 Cor. viii. 8. and Rom. xiv. 2—6.

^b Rom. xiv. 20, 21.

^c 1 Cor. x. 23.

^d 1 Cor. viii. 13.

^e Ezra vii. 16—18. with viii. 22.

and Nehemiah might have gone into the temple, to save himself from danger^f: but they both chose rather to expose their lives to any peril, rather than do what in their circumstances would have been open to misconstruction, and would have been imputed to them as sin. Thus there are some amusements and indulgences which, under particular circumstances and in a limited degree, *may be* innocent, from which we nevertheless ought to abstain; lest an undue advantage be taken of our conduct, and we be considered as patronizing that, which, under other circumstances, would be positively evil.]

2. The manner in which we do them—

[Much, very much, depends on the manner in which we do things which in themselves are inoffensive or even good. None can doubt but that alms-deeds, prayer, and fasting, are good in themselves; yet they may be so performed as to be open to the imputation of vanity or hypocrisy: on which account our Lord gives us rules for the due discharge of these duties^g. To give instruction or reproof to our neighbours is doubtless an important office; but if it be performed in an unbecoming spirit, we shall appear to others to be only venting our own spleen, and all our endeavours will be lost upon them. Hence is that direction given us by the Apostle, “Let not your good be evil spoken of^h.”]

3. The end for which we do them—

[Daniel might with great propriety have prayed in his house with his windows shut: yea, it might have been thought, perhaps, more decorous. But, in his circumstances, he determined to die rather than to suspend his devotions, or even to conceal them by shutting his windows. He was in the midst of idolaters, and therefore he judged it necessary openly to confess his God. And, when the edict was issued by the Persian monarch to forbid the offering of any petition to any one except himself for the space of thirty days, Daniel was more bound than ever to worship openly; because the concealing of his devotions would have been considered as a renunciation or denial of his God. Hence he determined to make no alteration whatever in his conduct, but to abide the consequences of his fidelity to Godⁱ. Thus should *we* walk circumspectly, “cutting off occasion from them that seek occasion;” and determining that our enemies “shall find no cause of complaint against us, except concerning the law of our God^k.”]

^f Neh. vi. 10—31. ^g Matt. vi. 1—6, 16—18.

^h Rom. xiv. 16.

ⁱ Dan. vi. 10.

^k Dan. vi. 5.

To impress this injunction the more deeply on our minds, let us consider,

II. The importance of it—

The avoiding of all appearance of evil is of great consequence,

1. To ourselves—

[Our character is stamped by our actions *as they appear to the world*. God only can judge the heart: man must of necessity form his judgment in a great measure from the outward appearance: though doubtless he is to put the best possible construction upon every thing, so far as truth and reason will admit. We owe it therefore to ourselves to guard against every thing that either deservedly or undeservedly may bring an evil report upon us. St. Paul was very attentive to this, when he had collected a large sum of money for the poor saints in Judea: he desired that some person of established reputation should go with him, that so he might “provide things honest in the sight of all men¹,” and “give no occasion to the enemy to speak reproachfully^m.”]

2. To the world around us—

[The world are ever ready to spy out causes of complaint against the people of God, and, when they behold a flaw, to cry out, “There, there, so would we have it.” Instantly they proceed to blame religion itself for what they see amiss in the professors of it; and justify themselves as acting a more becoming and consistent part. On this account we should “walk in wisdom towards them that are withoutⁿ,” and, if possible, “put to silence the ignorance of foolish men by well-doing^o.” Indeed, as they may be hardened in their sins by an injudicious conduct, so they may be “won by the good conversation” of those around them^p. It may be, that our light shining before them may constrain them to confess that God is with us of a truth, and lead them to “glorify our Father that is in heaven^q.” Can we need any greater argument for circumspection? Should not this consideration induce us all to adopt the Psalmist’s resolution: “I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way^r,” and make us pray with him, “Lead me, O Lord, because of mine observers; make thy way straight before my face^s.”]

3. To the Church of God—

¹ 2 Cor. viii. 19—21.

^m 1 Tim. v. 14.

ⁿ Col. iv. 5.

^o 1 Pet. ii. 15.

^p 1 Pet. iii. 1, 2.

^q Matt. v. 16.

^r Ps. ci. 2.

^s Ps. v. 8. the marginal translation.

[A discreet and blameless conduct is no less important as it respects the Church. The weak are of necessity much influenced by those whom they consider as more advanced than themselves: and, if they see any thing done by a person whom they respect, they will be ready to follow his example, even though they are doubtful in their minds respecting the lawfulness of the act itself. Then, even though the act be lawful, they commit sin, because they are not thoroughly persuaded of its innocence^t. And we, if we pay no attention to their weaknesses, actually sin against Christ ourselves, and are guilty of destroying a soul for whom Christ died^u. Let us not then imagine ourselves at liberty to do all things which are in themselves lawful; for we are not at liberty to cast a stumbling-block before a weak brother^x; but are to consult his good, no less than our own^y.]

INFER—

1. How far are they from real Christians who can live in known and allowed sin!

[Christianity requires us to abstain even from the appearance of evil: how much more from sin itself! Ah, beloved, you may easily see the folly and hypocrisy of calling yourselves Christians, while your whole conduct proclaims that you have no delight in God, nor any higher aim than to approve yourselves to men.]

2. How excellent is the true Christian in comparison of others!

[Christians are not improperly called “the excellent of the earth.” Behold their care, their tenderness, their circumspection, their “dread of even a garment spotted by the flesh^z.” Their conduct is fitly described by the Apostle; “Whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, these they both think upon” and perform^a. “See then, Christians, that these things be in you, and abound.” Let not “our boasting of you be found in vain” and delusive. But “as ye have received how ye ought to walk and to please God, so abound more and more^b.”]

^t Acts xiv. 23.

^x Rom. xiv. 13, 15.

^z Jude, ver. 23.

^b 1 Thess. iv. 1.

^u 1 Cor. viii. 9—12.

^y 1 Cor. x. 24.

^a Phil. iv. 8.

MMCCIX.

COMPLETE SANCTIFICATION TO BE SOUGHT AFTER.

1 Thess. v. 23, 24. *The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.*

PARENTS naturally desire the prosperity of their children; but they can by no means secure it: even though their children should be disposed to concur with them in every prudent plan, yet cannot their combined efforts insure success; since, in numberless instances, “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.” The spiritual parent, who by the ministration of the Gospel hath begotten sons and daughters to the Lord, is more favourably circumstanced: he is sure that no untoward circumstances shall disappoint his hopes, provided only his children exert themselves as becomes them, in the appointed way. True indeed it is, that success in spiritual things is infinitely more difficult to be obtained, on account of the obstacles which are to be surmounted, and the enemies which are to be subdued. But Omnipotence is engaged in behalf of all who sincerely labour for themselves: nor is there any attainment, to which they who go forward in the strength of God may not confidently aspire. The object which St. Paul desired in behalf of his Thessalonian converts was doubtless exceeding great: it was, that they might be “sanctified throughout, and be preserved blameless unto the day of Christ:” but “his hope concerning them was steadfast,” being founded, not on their weak powers, but on the power and fidelity of God, who had undertaken to “perfect that which concerned them^a.” In illustrating the words before us, we shall notice,

I. The blessing desired—

^a Ps. cxxxviii. 8.

This was the greatest that mortal man can enjoy on earth : it was,

1. The sanctification of their whole man—

[Man is usually spoken of as consisting of two parts, a body and a soul : but he may, perhaps with more propriety, be considered as having three parts;—a corporeal substance ; an animal soul, like that which exists in the lower orders of creation ; and a rational immortal spirit, which connects him with the world above. This distinction between the soul and spirit is to be found also in the Epistle to the Hebrews ; where it is said, that “the word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder the soul and spirit^b.” In all of these parts, man is corrupt : “his body, in all its members, is only, and invariably, an instrument of unrighteousness unto sin^c :” his animal soul, with all its affections and lusts, leads him to those gratifications only, of which the brutes partake in common with him^d : and his immortal soul is filled with all those evil dispositions which characterize the fallen angels, such as, pride, envy, malice, discontent, and rebellion against God. These different kinds of wickedness are frequently distinguished by the Apostle, according to the sources from whence they spring : he speaks of the unconverted man as “fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind^e ;” and tells us, that we must “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, if we would perfect holiness in the fear of God^f.” Agreeably to these distinctions, the character of fallen man is, that he is “earthly, sensual, and devilish^g.” In all of these parts, then, we need to be renewed and sanctified : we need to have our bodies made instruments of “righteousness unto holiness^h ;” our souls, with “their affections and lusts, crucifiedⁱ ;” and our spirits “renewed after the Divine image, in righteousness and true holiness^k.” Hence St. Paul prays for the Thessalonian converts, that they may be sanctified “*wholly*,” that is, *throughout their whole man*, even “in their whole spirit, and soul, and body.” This, and this only, will constitute us “new creatures :” “the old things” pertaining to every part of us must “have passed away, and all things must have become new^l :” then alone can we be said to be “partakers of the divine nature^m ;” and then alone have we any satisfactory evidence that we are Christians indeedⁿ.

This entire change was the first part of the blessing which St. Paul solicited in their behalf. But he could not be satisfied with this, he therefore further entreated,]

^b Heb. iv. 12.

^c Rom. vi. 12, 13.

^d Jude, ver. 10.

^e Eph. ii. 3.

^f 2 Cor. vii. 1.

^g Jam. iii. 15.

^h Rom. vi. 19.

ⁱ Gal. v. 24.

^k Eph. iv. 23, 24.

^l 2 Cor. v. 17.

^m 2 Pet. i. 4.

ⁿ 2 Cor. v. 17.

2. The continuance of it unto the day of Christ—

[To be made thus “blameless” is doubtless an unspeakable blessing; but it would be of little service to us, if we were to lose it again, and to return to our former state of sin and uncleanness. This is an idea which many lovers of human systems do not like: but it is inculcated in every part of the Holy Scriptures: nor can any man get rid of this idea, without doing violence to many of the plainest passages of Holy Writ, and, I had almost said, “wresting them to his own destruction.”

By the Prophet Ezekiel, God tells us, that, “if the righteous man depart from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, his righteousness shall no more be remembered; but for the iniquity that he committeth, he shall die^o.” St. Paul warns us, “that, if after tasting of the heavenly gift, and being made partakers of the Holy Ghost, we fall away, it is impossible, (or so difficult as to be all but impossible,) for us ever to be renewed unto repentance^p.” St. Peter speaks yet more plainly, assuring us, that, “if after having escaped the pollutions of the world *through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, we be again entangled therein, and overcome, our latter end will be worse than the beginning: for that it would be better for us never to have known the way of righteousness, than, after we have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto us^q.”

Hence St. Paul prayed for the Thessalonians, that they might “be preserved blameless unto the day of Christ.” To run well for a season would avail them nothing, if they were hindered at last. To little purpose would they have “begun in the Spirit, if they ended in the flesh.” We must “endure to the end, if ever we would be saved^r.” And so important is this truth, and so necessary to be inculcated on the minds of even the most exalted Christians, that our blessed Lord himself, in his Letters to the Seven Churches, closes every letter with this solemn admonition, that “to him that overcometh,” and *to him only*, shall the full blessings of his salvation ever be extended^s — — — Hence are those frequent cautions against declension in the life and power of godliness^t. The Lord grant we may ever bear them in mind! for God himself expressly says, “If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him^u.”

On these accounts the Apostle prayed for them, that “the work begun in them might be carried on and perfected unto the day of Christ^x.”]

^o Ezek. xviii. 24. ^p Heb. vi. 4—6. ^q 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.

^r Matt. xxiv. 13. ^s Rev. ii. 7, 10, 17, 26. and iii. 5, 12, 21.

^t 2 John, ver. 8. Rev. iii. 11. 2 Pet. iii. 14, 17, 18.

^u Heb. x. 38.

^x Phil. i. 6.

Vast as this blessing was, he did not doubt of obtaining it in their behalf. This appears from,

II. The assurance given—

To the attainment of this blessed state God “callesh us” in his Gospel—

[“God hath not called us to uncleanness, but unto holiness,” even to the highest measure of it that can possibly be attained. He says not only, “Be ye holy, *for* I am holy^y,” but, “Be ye holy, *as* I am holy,” and “perfect, *as* your Father which is in heaven is perfect^z.”]

And, as “the God of peace,” he promises to raise us to it—

[“God, having given us his Son to bear our sins in his own body on the tree, and to “make reconciliation for us through the blood of the cross,” is pleased to reveal himself to us under the endearing character of “the God of peace:” and being now “*our* God and Father in Christ Jesus,” he undertakes to do for us all that shall be necessary for our final acceptance with him in the day of judgment. He promises to “sprinkle clean water upon us, and to cleanse us from all our filthiness, and from all our idols^a.” He teaches us also to look, not to his mercy only, or his power, to effect this, but to his truth and faithfulness, yea, and to his very justice too: “He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness^b.” This, I say, he promises to us, being first of all become, through the atoning blood of Christ, a “God of peace.” We are not to get sanctification first, and then, in consequence of that sanctification, to find him a “God of peace;” but first to look to him as reconciled to us in Christ Jesus, and then to experience the sanctifying operations of his Spirit. This order must be particularly noticed in our text, as also in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where it is particularly marked^c: if we overlook this, we shall be in danger of misapprehending and perverting the whole Gospel of Christ: but if we bear this in mind, then may we expect from God a full and complete salvation. In many places does he pledge his faithfulness to do for us all that we can stand in need of, and never to discontinue his mercies towards us^d — — — He may punish us, and hide his face from us; but he will not utterly abandon us, or cast us off^e.]

^y 1 Pet. i. 15, 16. ^z Matt. v. 48. ^a Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.

^b 1 John. i. 9. ^c Heb. xiii. 20, 21.

^d 1 Cor. i. 8, 9. and 2 Thess. iii. 3.

^e Ps. lxxxix. 30—36. Jer. xxxii. 40.

We must, however, be found in the diligent use of the appointed means—

[The dependence of his blessing on the use of the appointed means is not always expressed; but it is always implied. “He will be inquired of by us,” before he will do for us the things which he has most freely promised^f. He has appointed the means as well as the end, or rather I should say, the end by the means: he has “chosen us to salvation; but it is through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth^g.” He alone has the power whereby our salvation must be affected, as the words of our text very strongly imply^h: but he expects that we exert ourselves, as much as if all the power resided in our own arm: and the very consideration which many persons urge as a reason for their inactivity, is suggested by him as a reason and encouragement for our most strenuous exertionsⁱ. If we will not ask, and seek, and strive, we must expect nothing at his hands: but if we will put forth our own feeble energies in the way of duty, he will “strengthen us by his Spirit in our inward man,” and “make us more than conquerors through Him that loved us.”]

From this subject we may LEARN,

1. How mistaken they are who think that the Gospel leads to licentiousness—

[What symptom of licentiousness is here? Rather, may we not challenge every religious system in the universe to produce morality like unto this? Other systems provide for “the cleansing of the outside of the cup and platter;” but no other so effectually reaches the heart. The Gospel provides for the sanctification of all our faculties and powers, and for the transformation of our whole man into the very image of our God. Its language is, “Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace^k.” And its effect is, to produce in every mind the desire which is so affectionately expressed in the text, and not for others only, but for ourselves also. Let all jealousy then on this head be put aside: and let us seek to be justified freely by faith in Christ; that, having peace with God through his precious blood, we may receive the communications of his grace more abundantly, and be “changed into his image from glory to glory by the Spirit of our God.”]

2. How deluded they are who rest in Christian principles, without aspiring after Christian attainments—

^f Ezek. xxxvi. 37. ^g 2 Thess. ii. 13. 1 Pet. i. 2.

^h αὐτὸς ὁ Θεός.

ⁱ Phil. ii. 12, 13.

^k Rom. vi. 14.

[Such there have been in every age of the Church. Not that the Gospel has in itself any tendency to create such characters; but the corruption of men's hearts will take occasion from the Gospel to foster sentiments, which are, in reality, subversive of its most fundamental truths. Many regard all exhortations to holiness as legal: yea, there are not wanting some who will maintain, that Christ, having fulfilled the law for us, has absolved us from all obligation to obey it in any of its commands. They affirm that it is cancelled, not only as a covenant of works, but *as a rule of life*. They profess, that the sanctification of Christ is imputed to us, precisely as his righteousness is; and that we need no personal holiness, because we have a sufficient holiness in him. Horrible beyond expression are such sentiments as these: and how repugnant they are to those contained in our text, it is needless to observe. That some who advance these sentiments are externally moral, and often benevolent, must be confessed: (if any be truly pious, it is not *by means* of these principles, but *in spite* of them:) but the great body of them, with, it is to be feared, but few exceptions, bear the stamp of their unchristian principles in their whole spirit and conduct. The whole family of them may be distinguished by the following marks. They are full of *pride* and *conceit*, imagining that none can understand the Gospel but themselves. Such is their *confidence* in their own opinions, that they seem to think it impossible that they should err. They are *dogmatical* in the extreme, laying down the law for every one, and expecting all to bow to their judgment: and so *contemptuous* are they, that they speak of all as blind and ignorant who presume to differ from them. Their *irreverent* manner of treating the great mysteries of our religion is also most offensive; they speak of them with a most unhallowed familiarity, as though they were common things: and so *profane* are they, that they hesitate not to sneer at the very word of God itself, whenever it militates against their favourite opinions. "By these fruits ye shall know them;" and by these fruits ye may judge of their principles. True indeed, with their errors they bring forth much that is sound and good: but this only renders their errors the more palatable and the more delusive. They altogether vitiate the taste of the religious world, and indispose them for all practical instruction. They so exclusively set forth what may be called "the strong meat" of the Gospel, as to withhold all "milk" from the household of our God¹. In a word, they promote nothing but *spiritual intoxication*, and banish from the Church all *spiritual sobriety*.

In what we have said, we design not to mark the characters

¹ Heb. v. 13, 14. 1 Cor. iii. 2.

of any particular *men*, but the character and effect of their *principles*: and we do not hesitate to say again, that this is the true character and effect of *Antinomianism*, wherever it exists.

In opposition to all who would thus make “Christ a minister of sin,” we must declare, that he came to save his people, not *in* their sins, but *from* them^m; and that “the grace of God which bringeth salvation, teaches, and must ever teach, men to live righteously, and soberly, and godly in this present worldⁿ,” yea, and to “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God^o.”]

3. How blessed they are who have obtained peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ—

[You are not called to “make bricks without straw.” That God, who is now reconciled to you through the Son of his love, undertakes to supply you with “grace sufficient for you^p,” and to “fulfil in you all the good pleasure of his goodness, even the work of faith with power^q.” And is he not *able* to do this? or will he forget his promises, or “suffer one jot or tittle of his word to fail?” No: “He is faithful who hath promised, who also will do it.” Be of good courage then, whatever difficulties ye may have to encounter. Know, that “greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world^r.” Gird on the armour which is provided for you, and “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus^s.” Our prayer for you is the same as that of St. Paul for the Thessalonian Christians: yes, beloved, “this is our wish, even your perfection^t.” And we rejoice in the thought that “God is able to make all grace abound towards you, that ye, having always all-sufficiency in all things, may abound unto every good work^u.” Only look to him as “a God of love and peace,” and you shall find that “what he hath promised he is able also to perform^x.”]

^m Matt. i. 21.

ⁿ Tit. ii. 11, 12.

^o Col. iv. 12.

^p 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^q 2 Thess. i. 11.

^r 1 John iv. 4.

^s Eph. vi. 10, 11. 2 Tim. ii. 1.

^t 2 Cor. xiii. 9.

^u 2 Cor. ix. 8.

^x Rom. iv. 21.

2 THESSALONIANS.

MMCCX.

THE STATE OF THE THESSALONIAN CHURCH.

2 Thess. i. 3—7. *We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; so that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled, rest.*

ONE advantage which we derive from the epistles of St. Paul is, that we are enabled to see in them an endless diversity both of characters and attainments. Every occurrence in the different cities where the apostolic churches were planted, has given occasion for suitable remarks, which, though adapted in the first instance to a particular place or circumstance, are applicable in some considerable degree to the Church of God in all ages. In some of the epistles we have the Church presented to us in a declining state; and suitable admonitions are given to her: in others we see her prospering, and hear the counsels of infinite wisdom proclaimed unto her. The Thessalonian Church was of the latter character, and seems to have been eminently favoured of her God. She was high in the esteem also of the Apostle Paul;

and deservedly so, because she was conspicuous amongst all the Churches of that age for her high attainments. The words I have just read will lead me to consider,

I. The happy state of the Thessalonian Church—

In her infant state she was highly commended for “her works of faith, and labours of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ^a.” But here we view her in her more adult state : we behold,

1. Her increasing faith—

[The Apostle testifies respecting the believers there, that their faith “had grown exceedingly,” being daily more vivid in its apprehensions, more vigorous in its actings, more uniform in its effects. It is of the very nature of faith to fix on things that are invisible, and to make them, as it were, present to the soul. And in this their faith had evinced its growth, in that it had enabled them to see, almost as with their bodily eyes, the Saviour whom they loved, enthroned above all powers and principalities, invested with a fulness of all spiritual gifts, ordering all things both in heaven and earth, and, by his prevailing intercession at the right hand of God, securing to his believing people all the blessings of grace and glory. They further saw, as from Mount Pisgah, the land of which they were ere long to take possession : the thrones, the crowns, the harps of gold, all prepared and made ready for them, against the time appointed for their complete possession of their inheritance. Of these things they had some view at first, just as a man has of the firmament on a cloudy night : but now, as when through a pure unclouded atmosphere, a man beholds the vast canopy of heaven studded in every part with stars more brilliant than the brightest gem ; so now their view of Christ, and of all the inconceivable glories of redeeming love, was clear and full. A corresponding energy too was felt through all the powers of their souls, accompanied with a fixed determination of heart to live for Him who lived and died for them.]

2. Her abounding love—

[This was no less remarkable. In almost every Church, partly from a diversity of views and interests, and partly from the infirmity of our common nature, there are some comparative alienations of heart, if not some actual disagreements. But here “the charity of *every one of them all* towards each other *abounded*.” One spirit pervaded the whole body : and time, instead of giving occasion to the enemy to foment differences,

^a 1 Thess. i. 3.

had only cemented and confirmed their mutual affection. In this they shewed how much they were grown in grace, seeing that they were so greatly assimilated to the image of their God, whose name and nature is LOVE. Happy, happy people, where "the unity of the Spirit was so perseveringly kept in the bond of peace!"]

3. The invincible firmness of her patience—

[Great had been their trials from the very beginning^b: and though we know but little of particulars, we are assured in general, that the persecutions which they experienced from their own countrymen were of the most cruel and bitter kind^c. But were they intimidated? No; "they held fast the profession of their faith without wavering:" they "were in nothing terrified by their adversaries:" "they had respect unto the recompence of the reward;" and took joyfully the afflictions with which they were visited, knowing that they had in heaven enough to compensate for all. They even "gloried in the cross of Christ," and "rejoiced that they were counted worthy to bear it for his sake." In the midst of all, they "possessed their souls in patience," and suffered "patience to have its perfect work."

What an enviable state was this! But,]

That we may form a right estimate of this state, let us consider,

II. In what light the Apostle viewed it—

He knew not to give flattering words to any man: yet he could not but declare that he regarded their state as a fit subject,

1. Of thanksgiving to God—

[God was the author of the grace they first received: and he was the giver also of all the improvement they had made of it. "Of him, and him alone, was all their fruit found." To him therefore the Apostle gave the glory, "as it was fit" he should, and as he found himself "bound" to do. The creation of the material world was his: nor was the new creation of their souls at all less the work of his hands. True, he made use of the will of men: but he first of all implanted that will in them, and then made use of it for the accomplishment of his own most gracious purposes. From first to last "he gave them both to will and to do of his good pleasure," being alike "the author and the finisher" of all.

Thus then should we also do for all that is good, whether in

^b 1 Thess. i. 6.

^c 1 Thess. ii. 14, 15.

ourselves, or others. We should acknowledge him in it, and glorify him for it, and confess, in relation to it all, that “by the grace of God we are what we are.”]

2. Of commendation in the Church—

[“He gloried of them” in the different Churches where he ministered: for he not only found pleasure in speaking well of them, but he thought it of great utility to the Church of God to hear of the proficiency which others had made; inasmuch as it would stimulate them also to greater exertions, and encourage them to expect greater measures of divine grace, in order to their own more exalted proficiency. This was the case with respect to the Corinthian Church. St. Paul boasted of them to the Churches in Macedonia, that Achaia had shewn extraordinary readiness in providing for the poor saints in Judea; and, in speaking of this to the Corinthians, he says, “Your zeal hath provoked very many^d.” And so should it be with us. When we look at Prophets and Apostles, we are apt to think that it would be presumptuous to hope for such grace as they possessed: but when we see common individuals, or whole churches, far exalted above us in every thing that is good, we should be ashamed, and never cease to emulate and rival their attainments.]

3. Of congratulation to themselves—

[These graces, exercised under such peculiar circumstances, were sufficient to demonstrate, that there must be a future state of retribution, where the present inequalities of the Divine procedure should be rectified: they were an evidence too that in that day “*they* should be counted worthy of that kingdom for which they suffered such things.” It could not fail, but that in that day a suitable recompence should be given both to themselves and their oppressors: to those “who caused their tribulation, trouble,” proportioned to the trouble they had occasioned: but “to those who had endured the trouble, rest,” even everlasting rest in the bosom of their God, “with all the Prophets and Apostles” who had endured the same things before them.

Now to know this, must be an exceeding great consolation to them under their multiplied afflictions: and therefore he could not but declare to them, that, if they had, on the one hand, so much reason to complain, they had, on the other hand, abundantly more reason to rejoice; since they had, even in these very afflictions, an evidence of their meetness for glory, and a pledge that in due season it should be conferred upon them.]

To *us* also will this account of them be profitable, if we duly consider,

^d 2 Cor. ix. 2.

III. What lessons we should learn from it—

Two things it may well teach us :

1. That opposition, how formidable soever it may be, is no excuse for our turning back from God—

[What are our persecutions, in comparison of those which they endured? Yet they were “steadfast, immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord.” Should we then be intimidated? Should we hesitate whom to obey, or what course to follow? No; we should take up our cross cheerfully; and having counted the cost, should be content to pay it. The stony-ground hearer, when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, may well draw back, because he has no root in him: but the true disciple will go with his life in his hand, and be willing not only to make minor sacrifices, but even to lay down his life for Christ’s sake. We must not imagine that such a line of conduct was necessary for the primitive Christians only: it is equally necessary for Christians in every age: and “he who loves his life shall lose it; and he only who is willing to lose his life for Christ’s sake, shall find it unto life eternal.”]

2. That whatever proficiency we have made in the Divine life, we should still press forward for higher attainments—

Certainly the proficiency of the Thessalonians was very eminent, even in the earlier state of their progress; for even then “they were ensamples to all believers, both in Macedonia and Achaia.” But they had not rested in their attainments: they had pressed forward for the highest possible degrees of grace: and through mercy they had attained a most uncommon eminence in the divine life. So we, if we had advanced as far as St. Paul himself, should, like him, “forget all that was behind, and reach forward to that which was before, and press forward to the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” We should aspire after a perfect resemblance to our Saviour’s image; and seek, if possible, so to be poured into the mould of the Gospel, as to have every lineament of our character conformed to it. We should think nothing attained, as long as any thing remained to be attained. We should seek to “grow up into Christ in all things, as our Head,” and to “be changed into his image from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord.”]

APPLICATION :—But,

1. How different from the Thessalonian Church are the generality of those who call themselves Christians!

[Many have heard the Gospel to little purpose ; or rather, “our entering in unto them has been altogether in vain^e.” If we look for their works of faith, and labours of love, and patience of hope, as evidences that the word has come to them with power, we find no more than others have who never heard the Gospel at all. As to a visible growth in these things, there is no symptom of it: they have continued from the beginning even to the present hour nearly the same persons, perfectly satisfied with themselves, and not less unconscious of the need of any change, than unconcerned about it. But let not such persons account themselves Christians indeed ; or imagine that they can be thought worthy of that kingdom for which they have never suffered, never laboured, never cared. To such persons the conduct of the Thessalonians, if exhibited before their eyes, would be rather an object of derision than of admiration and love: and consequently they have in themselves “a manifest token,” that they have nothing to expect at God’s hands, but the measure which they have dealt out to his obedient people. I entreat you, brethren, consider that in the day of judgment the righteousness of God will be so visibly displayed, as to constrain the whole assembled universe to acknowledge it, as well in those that are saved, as in them that perish. How it can be displayed in the salvation of such as you, judge ye. Mercy, I grant, might be exhibited ; but righteousness would find no plea for rewarding you, no justification in your acquittal: for if God be just, there must be a difference put between those who have served him, and those who have served him not—a difference, which may well make every one of you to tremble.]

2. How diligently should the most exalted amongst you press forward in your heavenly course !

[There is room enough for improvement in every child of man. Think, beloved, how much more strong and operative your faith might be ; how much more ardent and influential your love ; how much more firm and patient your hope. You know but little of yourselves, if you are not daily mourning over your short-comings and defects. Let all of you then, without exception, seek to “grow in grace:” if you are “children,” seek to become “young men;” if you are “young men,” seek to become “fathers in Christ:” and if you are fathers, still seek to become more and more like to Christ, till you “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” If, as is probable, your zeal will provoke the greater opposition against you, welcome it, as “turning to you for a testimony,” and as rendering you more like to Him who endured the contradiction of sinners against himself, and suffered even unto

^e 1 Thess. ii. 1.

death. So will your meetness for heaven daily increase, and be more fully recognised by your God and Saviour in the last day : and you need never fear but that the recompence which he will bestow, will amply compensate for all that you can do or suffer in this vale of tears.]

MMCCXI.

CHRIST'S COMING TO JUDGE THE WORLD.

2 Thess. i. 7—10. *The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ : who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power ; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.*

WE cannot behold the state of the world around us, but we must feel a need of some future day of retribution. Multitudes there are, in every place, who are racked with incessant pains, or pining all their days in want and misery ; while others, in no respect superior to them in moral qualities, pass their time in ease and affluence. From hence it is reasonable to conclude, that there will be a period wherein the present inequalities in the dispensations of Providence shall be so adjusted, as to mark more clearly God's regard to equity. If we look into the Church of God, this argument receives additional strength : for there we see the holiest and best of men, men " of whom the world is not worthy," hated, reviled, persecuted ; while their proud oppressors exult in their tyranny, and glory in their shame. Can it be imagined that God will never recompense the fidelity of his servants, or notice the impiety of his enemies ? Shall religion always suffer ? Shall iniquity always triumph ? It cannot be. The very existence of such enormities is " a manifest proof," or demonstration, that there will be a " righteous judgment of God," wherein he will shew it to be " a righteous thing with him to recompense tribulation to the troublers

of his Israel, and rest to the troubled." The mention of this period is introduced by the Apostle in this very view: and, to impress the thought more powerfully on our minds, he describes, in most energetic terms, *the manner* in which our Lord will come to judgment, and *the ends* for which he will come. Let us consider,

I. The manner in which our Lord will come to judgment—

[This, though solemn and instructive, must not occupy much of our attention at this time, because of the superior importance of the latter part of our subject. "The Lord Jesus" is the person that is "ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead^a." He is at present in heaven, whither he ascended from Mount Olivet, and "where he will continue till the time of the restitution of all things^b:" but at the appointed time he "will be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire." When he first came into the world, his advent was obscure; but at his second coming it will be exceeding glorious. He will be attended with an innumerable host of angels, who, on account of their inconceivable strength and power, are called "mighty;" and who are represented as "*his*" angels, because they were created by him, and are continually employed in his service. At the day of judgment in particular they will be actively engaged, in separating the righteous from the wicked^c," in "binding up, as it were, the wicked in bundles to cast them into the fire" of hell^d, and in "gathering together the elect^e," in order to their more complete enjoyment of the glory prepared for them. The majesty of his appearance will be greatly increased by his being surrounded with "flaming fire." When formerly he descended on Mount Sinai, "the whole mountain burned with fire," in so awful a manner, that the whole nation of Israel, and even "Moses himself, exceedingly trembled and quaked^f." But on his future descent from heaven, "his throne will be like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire; and a fiery stream will issue and come forth from before him^g:" at the same time the earth itself also shall be on fire, the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the whole globe whereon we live shall burst forth in one vast and universal conflagration^h.

How terrible this scene will be, no words can express, no

^a Acts xvii. 31.

^b Acts iii. 21.

^c Matt. xiii. 49.

^d Matt. xiii. 30, 39.

^e Matt. xxiv. 31.

^f Exod. xix. 16, 18. with Heb. xii. 21.

^g Dan. vii. 9, 10.

^h 2 Pet. iii. 10.

imagination can conceive: but that day is justly characterized as "the great and terrible day of the Lord!"

This description is doubly awful as connected with,

II. The ends of his coming—

These are,

1. The punishment of the wicked—

[It is commonly thought, that if we be moral in our conduct, we need not trouble ourselves about religious principles. But whom will the Lord punish in that day? the immoral and profane? Yes, doubtless: but shall these be the only monuments of his indignation? No: he will "take vengeance also on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." In these words are comprehended not only the idolatrous Gentiles, and the unbelieving Jews, but all amongst ourselves also who do not *practically* know God, and *unreservedly* obey the Gospel. Theoretical knowledge, or hypocritical profession, will be of no avail: we must *FEEL* our *obligation to God* as our Benefactor, *our duty towards him* as our Governor, and *our dependence on him* as our Father and our Friend. We must, moreover, *EMBRACE* the salvation which he has offered us in the Gospel, *trusting solely in the merit* of our Redeemer's blood, *living wholly on the fulness* that is treasured up for us in him, and *devoting ourselves entirely to him*, as his redeemed people.

Would to God this point were sufficiently considered! Brethren, mark attentively the declaration in the text, and then see what becomes of those presumptuous sentiments which are so confidently asserted, and so generally received. See whether morality be all: see whether you are at liberty to disregard the Gospel: see whether the principles of Christianity are of so little consequence, that you may be saved without them: see whether that obedience to the Gospel, which is derided as fanaticism, be a matter of indifference, or deserving of the odium cast upon it. Ah! be assured that, whatever the ungodly world may say or think, all they who do not truly *know* God, and cordially *obey* the Gospel, shall perish for ever^k.

Nor let it be thought that the punishment of such persons shall be light, or of short duration. The Apostle enlarges on the idea, in order to fix it more deeply in our minds. Such persons shall be banished "from the presence of the Lord," and from all the bright displays of "his power and glory." Nor shall they merely suffer this *loss* (though that were inexpressibly dreadful): they shall also be exposed to *pain* and

ⁱ Joel ii. 11, 31.

^k 1 Pet. iv. 17.

anguish, such as God alone can inflict, and such as would destroy their very existence, if the same power that inflicted it did not uphold them under it. To this punishment there shall be no mitigation, no intermission, no end: it will be “everlasting:” they will have “no rest day or night; and the smoke of their torment will ascend up for ever and ever¹.” The Judge himself will pronounce this sentence on them, “DEPART from me, ye cursed, into *everlasting* fire, prepared for the devil and his angels^m.”]

2. The salvation of the righteous—

[As the honour of God is pledged for the condemnation of the wicked, so is it also involved in the happiness of the righteous. But who are the righteous? Mark the description given of them in the text: they are “the saints,” and “those who believe.” Here then again let infidels and scoffers read their doom: the people, the only people that shall be saved, are they who *believe* in Christ, and are *sanctified* by his Spirit. Let the term “*Saints*” or “*Believers*” be used as expressions of contempt: the time is coming, when they who are worthy of those names shall be held in different estimation, and receive a juster recompence.

The Saviour, at his coming, shall be “glorified and admired *by* them.” *Now* he appears exceeding glorious in their eyes, even “fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovelyⁿ;” and *now* he is the one object of their love, their praise, their glorying^o: but, *in that day*, how will they be filled with wonder at the sight of him! How will they admire his sovereign grace, that chose them from the midst of an ungodly world; his love, that undertook to save them by his own blood; his patience, that bore with them under all their backslidings; his power, that kept them amidst so many enemies; his faithfulness, that accomplished to them so many promises! How will they adore his wisdom and goodness, in every one of his dispensations towards them! And how will the countless multitudes of the redeemed unite in one universal chorus, singing, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain;” “Salvation to our God, and to the Lamb, for ever!”

Then also will the Saviour be glorified and admired *in* them. While they were in this world, they shined as lights in it, and were “his epistles, known and read of all men.”

But how will he be glorified in them in that day, when all their unworthiness shall be contrasted with his goodness, and the work that he has wrought in them shall fully appear! If, in beholding a curious work, we begin to admire the artist,

¹ Rev. xiv. 11.

^m Matt. xxv. 41. Mark ix. 43—48.

ⁿ Cant. v. 10, 16.

^o Isai. xlv. 25. 1 Pet. i. 8.

how will he be admired when all the millions of his redeemed shall stand together, all of them "his workmanship," transformed from the image of the devil into the very image of their God! How will the virtue of his sacrifice, the prevalence of his intercession, the efficacy of his grace, and all the wonders of his love, then appear! When all, without exception, shall ascribe their salvation to him, how, I say, will he be admired *in all*, and glorified *by all*!

For this end then will he come, as well as to condemn the wicked: he will come to consummate the happiness of his saints, by discovering to them fully his own unveiled glory, and by putting upon them such a measure of his glory as their diversified capacities shall enable them to bear.]

INFER—

1. How studious should we be to *obtain* the knowledge of the Gospel—

[It cannot be too often repeated, that our salvation depends on our "*obeying* the Gospel of Christ:" yea, there is the greater necessity to repeat it, because men are so riveted to the idea, that morality is all. But before we suffer ourselves to be thus deceived, let us contemplate the inevitable consequences of yielding to that delusion: perish we must, as sure as God is true. Read but the text, and judge for yourselves. If it be the word of *man*, reject it; and suffer nobody to disturb your peace: but if it be the word of *God*, remember that neither you nor all the world can alter it. And let the recollection of what is there spoken dwell upon your minds, till it have brought you to the foot of the cross, and "determined you to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified."]

2. How earnest should we be in *diffusing* the knowledge of the Gospel—

[If we have spoken strongly on this subject, we have done so, because we believe the declaration in the text, and are convinced that they who now deny or disregard it, will find it true to their cost. Does not then this earnestness become us? If you were in as imminent danger with respect to your bodily life, as you are with respect to your souls, should we not be inexcusable, if we neglected to warn you, and to warn you with all earnestness? Surely, if all ministers felt the importance of these truths, they would "cry aloud, and not spare." If we had a due concern for the welfare of others, there would also be a greater readiness amongst us to go unto the heathen, and to shew unto them the way of salvation. Would a few trials or difficulties discourage us, if we considered the benefit that would accrue to our perishing fellow-creatures, or the recompence which we ourselves should in due time receive?

Beloved brethren, let us not fear the face of man; let us not regard a few scoffs or reproaches for the Lord's sake; let us not be backward to endure hardness as good soldiers: but let us look unto the end of all things; when the state of all shall be fixed in perfect correspondence with their present characters and conduct, and every individual in the universe receive a just "recompence of reward."]

MMCCXII.

MEETNESS FOR HEAVEN DESIRED.

2 Thess. i. 11, 12. *We pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power: that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

VARIOUS are the offices of Christian love; but none more valuable than that of intercession. In all its personal efforts, it communicates only such benefits as a creature can bestow: but in its applications to God in the behalf of any one, it brings down all the blessings of grace and glory. We say not indeed that intercession must of necessity prevail to the full extent of the blessings asked, or for every individual in whose behalf they are solicited: but they do prevail to a far greater extent than we are apt to imagine: and we know of nothing wherein love can exercise itself so profitably, as in frequent and fervent supplications to God for the object beloved. St. Paul's love was of no common cast: in fact, it knew no bounds: the sacrifice of life itself was welcomed by him, if it might but subserve the interests of immortal souls. In his prayers for them, there is a richness and fulness which marked at once the ardour of his mind, the depth of his knowledge, and the enlargement of his heart. No petition he could offer seemed sufficient to express the full extent of his desires. This appears in many of his prayers: and it is abundantly evident in that which we have selected for our consideration at this time.

Three things we must distinctly notice ;

I. The great object which he desired in their behalf—

This was, that they might find acceptance with God in the day of judgment—

[Of that day he is speaking in the preceding context: and he declares, that a sweet “rest” in the bosom of their God will be the portion of all who have approved themselves faithful to him under all their trials. This is the “calling” of which he speaks, and which he so designates, because it is the object to which believers are called: “They are called unto God’s eternal glory by Christ Jesus^a.”

Of this calling he prays that they may “be counted worthy.” What is the import of this expression, may be seen in the foregoing context, where it evidently refers, not to any *merit* in man, whereby he shall be justified before God, but to that *meetness* for heaven which shall serve to illustrate and display the equity of the Judge in his final decisions. The day of judgment is appointed not altogether for the purpose of awarding to men their proper doom; (for that, in reference to the soul at least, is adjudged to every one at the instant of his death:) it is rather appointed for the displaying before the whole assembled universe the righteousness of God in his dealings with the children of men; on which account it is called “the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God^b:” and the description given of that day in the preceding context particularly presents it to us in that view. We say then, that “the being accounted worthy” of that calling refers to the meetness of the soul for the participation of it; and the petition thus expressed, must be understood to this effect: ‘I pray, that in the last day you may be found to have possessed such a character, to have maintained such a conduct in this world, as shall “be an evident token of the righteous judgment of God,” when he shall assign to you the everlasting possession of “his kingdom” and glory^c.’

We have dwelt the more carefully on this, that we might cut off all occasion for mistake respecting the Apostle’s meaning in the text, throughout every part of which he most determinately marks the whole of our salvation as altogether of grace.]

Taking the petition then in this sense, we ask, Is it not such a petition as we are all concerned to offer both for ourselves and others?

[Who can reflect on the solemnities of that day, who can think of the discoveries which will then be brought to light,

^a 1 Pet. v. 10.

^b Rom. ii. 5.

^c ver. 5.

and the unexpected sentences that will be then awarded, and not earnestly desire, both for himself and for all who are dear to him, that the sentence which God shall pass on them may be one of approbation, and not of condemnation? I pray you, brethren, lay to heart this infinitely important subject; and never cease to pour out your souls before God, that you and yours may find acceptance before him in that day — — —]

In his further petitions for this object, he specifies,

II. The means by which he expected it to be accomplished—

[He considers the work as altogether of grace, in its origin, its progress, its consummation. God, in his infinite “goodness,” has ordained that his people shall possess such a measure of piety, as shall render them fully meet for the enjoyment of his presence and glory in the eternal world: and in reference both to the persons who shall possess it, and the measure in which they shall partake of it, he has exercised “his good pleasure,” disposing of all according to his own inscrutable purposes, and the eternal counsel of his own will^d. This good pleasure the Apostle desired might “be fulfilled in them” by the mighty working of God’s power, calling forth into activity the faith he had bestowed, and giving it a more transforming efficacy upon their souls.

It is in this way, and this way alone, that the divine life is carried on and perfected. It is by the production of faith in the soul that the soul begins to live: it is by the exercise of that faith that the soul is enabled to do and suffer what God requires: and it is by the augmentation of that faith that the soul is perfected after the Divine image. It is faith which realizes the things that are invisible to mortal eyes, and gives to futurity a present existence^e. It is the one principle in the soul, by which all its energies are called forth, and all its efforts are made effectual. The whole eleventh chapter to the Hebrews proves and illustrates this; and shews with what wisdom, as well as piety, the Apostle poured out his supplications before God.]

We shall not wonder at his desiring this great object, if we notice,

III. The end which he foresaw was to be accomplished by it—

Then “will the name of our Lord Jesus Christ be glorified in them”—

^d Eph. i. 5, 9, 11.

^e Heb. xi. 1.

[Even in this world he is glorified in and by his saints, as he himself has expressly declared^f. But the Apostle has respect rather to that day, wherein Christ will “come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe^g.” Verily he will then be glorified in them. In what bright colours will then the whole assembled universe behold the virtue of his sacrifice, and the efficacy of his grace, and his fidelity to all his promises! Of those that have been given him by the Father, not one will be lost^h: not one will be found to have been ever “plucked out of his handsⁱ.” What hosannahs will resound to him from all the hosts of the redeemed, all singing, “To Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and our Father, to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever; Amen!”]

Then will the saints also be “glorified in him”—

[Already, as members, do they participate in the glory of their Head, “in and with whom they are already sitting, as it were, in heavenly places:” they may be considered also as already glorified in and with him, in that they are placed by him as a city set on a hill, and made both the salt of the earth, and the lights of a dark world. But in that day their glory will be complete: for they shall then be “like him,” even in his perfect image, and be acknowledged by him in the presence of his Father and his holy angels, as his peculiar people, the purchase of his blood, the fruit of his travail, the jewels of his crown. Then shall all that is his, be theirs: his crown, his throne, his kingdom, his glory, all will be theirs, their inalienable property, their everlasting possession.]

Then too will all the wonders of God’s covenant, and the purposes of his grace, be unveiled and complete—

[All will then be seen to have been “according to the grace of our God, and the Lord Jesus Christ;” between whom all was concerted from eternity: “The counsel of peace,” says the prophet, “was between them both^k.” What wonder will not the developement of these stupendous mysteries excite throughout all the regions of the blessed; and to what songs of praise will it not give rise, through the never-ending ages of eternity! — — —

Contemplate these things, the object desired, the means by which it was to be effected, and the wonderful ends to be

^f John xvii. 10.

^g ver. 10.

^h John xvii. 12.

ⁱ John x. 28.

^k Zech. vi. 13.

attained by it; and this prayer will be found no less instructive to the mind, than it is reviving and refreshing to the soul.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have no experience of the things here prayed for—

[How many are at this moment ignorant of “the work of faith,” and of that “divine power” with which it operates in the soul! How many are altogether strangers to the idea of Christ being glorified in them, or their being glorified in him, or of the eternal purposes of God’s grace being displayed in them! Little have such persons known of true religion: they even “need to be taught the very first principles of the oracles of God.” O brethren, the Gospel is not such a meagre thing as you make it! it is a wonderful display of God’s mercy and grace in the redemption of a ruined world: and, wherever it is received aright, it will fill the soul with such views and such desires as are expressed in our text. Do not, I beseech you, continue ignorant of these things: for, if you know them not, or feel not their influence, how shall you stand accepted at the judgment-seat of Christ? It will be too late to commence your inquiries then: they must be begun now: yea, you must now glorify Christ by a life of faith in this world, if ever you are to be glorified with him in the world to come.]

2. Those whose prayers and intercessions accord with those of the holy Apostle—

[Doubtless there are many amongst you whose hearts go forth with the petitions in our text; and who shall ultimately experience all that our text unfolds. But, in order to this desirable end, we recommend to all to consider the strictness of the scrutiny at that day. Verily, the Judge, as he himself tells us, has “eyes like a flame of fire:” and he “tries the very hearts and reins, in order to give to every man according to his works¹.” It will be to little purpose to be “accounted worthy” by your fellow-creatures, if you be not so accounted by your God: and it must not be forgotten, that there are many who “have a name to live, whilst” yet, in reality, “they are dead.” O dread lest that should prove your state at the last: and be earnest with God in prayer, that he would “fulfil in you *all* the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power.” Be satisfied with nothing short of this. Aspire after the highest possible attainments, that the Lord Jesus Christ may even now be glorified in you, and that your

¹ Rev. ii. 18, 23.

meetness for his glory may be conspicuous in the eyes of all. So shall your intercessions prevail for others also; and in that great day, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, you shall shine forth as the sun in the firmament for ever and ever.]

MMCCXIII.

PROGRESS OF UNBELIEF.

2 Thess. ii. 11, 12. *For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

THE Apostles, even as our Lord himself had done, spake of the day of judgment as near at hand. To individual souls it was so; because at the instant of our death our state is irrevocably and eternally fixed. But, as it respects the world at large, it was, and still is, far distant; there being many prophecies yet to be accomplished, previous to its arrival. The Thessalonian converts, interpreting too literally some expressions in St. Paul's former epistle, had formed an expectation that the day of judgment was almost instantly to appear: the Apostle therefore, in this epistle, rectifies the mistake; and informs them that before that time there would be a most grievous apostasy in the Church, which would issue most fatally to the souls of all who should bear a part in it. It would originate in unbelief, and terminate in perdition.

The words which I have just read will lead me to trace the *progress of unbelief*; from its commencement, in the rejection of the Gospel, to its termination, in the destruction of the soul. When suffered to prevail, it leads to,

I. A wilful rejection of God's mercy in Christ—

It is not from a want of evidence that men reject the Gospel—

[There is in the Gospel evidence enough to satisfy any candid inquirer. But men have an aversion to the truth.

The Gospel requires of them a humiliation of soul, a renunciation of self-dependence, and a sanctity of heart and life, to which they are utterly indisposed. "They love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil"^a — — —]

Their rejection of it arises altogether from "an evil heart of unbelief"^b —

[The Gospel offers salvation, "salvation with eternal glory." But, however desirous men may be of happiness, they will not accept it on the terms proposed. The truth is offensive to their pride, their worldliness, their carnal inclinations; and therefore they hate it, and will not receive it, even though, "if received in the love of it, it would save them"^c.]

As the just punishment of this unfaithfulness, they are often left to experience,

II. A dereliction of God to judicial blindness—

Men, from love of error, often persuade themselves that it is truth—

[There are no persons more confident than those who reject the Gospel. Some will pour contempt upon it, as foolishness: others will make it a stumbling-block, as opposing some opinions which they are determined to maintain. And so resolutely will both the one and the other exclude all light from their minds, that they will not only hold fast their delusions, but will really "believe their own lie" — — —]

To this delusion God himself will often "give them up"—

["His Spirit shall not always strive with man." Both under the Jewish and Christian dispensation, "he has given over to a reprobate mind" those who shut their eyes against the truth, and "did not like to retain him in their knowledge"^d. Nor can there be any thing more just, than that, if we determinately "join ourselves to idols," he should say, "Let them alone"^e.]

This sentence once passed, the obstinate unbeliever suffers,

III. A final abandonment to everlasting damnation—

The very thought of damnation is terrible in the extreme—

[Who can contemplate what is implied in that judgment, and not tremble at it? — — —]

^a John iii. 19.

^b Heb. iii. 12.

^c ver. 10.

^d Ps. lxxxi. 11, 12. Rom. i. 28. John xii. 39, 40.

^e Hos. iv. 17.

Yet, to that shall the unbeliever be finally consigned—

[Plainly is this declared^f: and our blessed Lord commanded all his servants to declare it to the whole world^g. In truth, this is no other than the necessary consequence of unbelief: for the Gospel is the only remedy for the salvation of fallen man; and they who reject it have no other alternative than this. There is no medium between the salvation of the soul and its eternal condemnation: they who, through “love of unrighteousness,” disregard the one, must inevitably and eternally endure the other.]

INQUIRE then, I pray you,

1. What is your disposition towards the Gospel?

[Do not too hastily conclude that you love it: for if you love it, you cannot but hate and abhor every kind of unrighteousness; yea, and Christ himself must be precious to your souls. “Examine yourselves” by such tests as these, before you persuade yourselves “that you are in the faith:” and remember, that there is nothing more fatal, or indeed more common, than an ungrounded confidence. Many are “given over to a strong delusion; and so believe their own lie,” that they will never admit a fear of damnation, till they are left to endure it without a remedy.]

2. What are your prospects in the eternal world?

[If they who *reject* the Gospel are given over to damnation, need I say, what is the happy state of those who *receive* the Gospel? But, if I had the tongue of an angel, I could not adequately declare what *salvation* is. This however I can declare, that it is yours, it is yours infallibly, if you believe in Christ, and cast yourselves altogether on him. Nothing have you to fear, if He be yours: for “in him you have both righteousness and strength;” righteousness, to justify you before God; and strength, to fulfil his holy will. Look then to the Saviour, and you may regard heaven as yours. Look to the Saviour; and, as from Pisgah’s top, you may survey the promised land, and live in the sweet anticipation of all its blessedness and glory.]

^f John iii. 36.

^g Mark xvi. 16.

MMCCXIV.

THE SALVATION OF MEN TRACED TO ITS PROPER SOURCE.

2 Thess. ii. 13, 14. *We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth : whereunto he called you by our Gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

MUCH as the heart of man rises against the doctrine of election, it must be confessed that it occurs very frequently in the Holy Scriptures ; and therefore it ought not to be passed over in silence : and, if the advocates of that doctrine would be contented to state it as the Holy Scriptures state it, and to give it only that measure of prominence which it bears in the inspired writings, I cannot but think that much of the prejudice against it would subside. It is true, that nothing but deep humility of mind can ever lead a man so to acquiesce in it as to approve of it in his soul, and to adorn it in his life. But where that humility exists, as it did in the Apostle Paul, the doctrine will be most grateful to the soul, and will form a ground of most unfeigned praise to Almighty God. The Apostle is contrasting the state of the Thessalonians with that of many who should, at a future period, arise in the Church, whose presumption would know no bounds, and who, for their impiety, would be given over by God to final impenitence. Whilst those transgressors were doomed by God to everlasting misery, the Thessalonian converts were ordained to eternal life, having been from the beginning chosen of God to salvation, and having been in time called to the enjoyment of it through the ministry of that Gospel which the Apostle preached. For them therefore he gives thanks, as indeed he was bound to do, since it was a mercy that called for the devoutest praises and thanksgivings, from themselves and from all others in their behalf.

The grounds of his thanksgiving are,

I. Their election of God to the blessings of salvation—

In his thanksgiving he distinctly specifies,

1. The *end* to which they were elected—

[It was “salvation,” even “the salvation that was in Christ Jesus with eternal glory^a.” It was not to the means of salvation merely; for many enjoyed the means of salvation, on whose behalf he could not give thanks, yea, on whose account “he had continual heaviness and sorrow in his heart:” it was to salvation itself, with all its inconceivable and everlasting blessings that they were chosen^b; and *this* too, not merely from the beginning of the period when the Gospel was preached to them, or that they began to listen to it, but “from before the foundation of the world^c.”

From hence it appears, that there is, and ever has been, “a remnant according to the election of grace^d,” unknown indeed to man, but known to God, and from all eternity given by him to his Son, to be the purchase of his blood, and the partners of his glory^e.]

2. The *means* by which that end is to be attained—

[The great argument against the doctrine of election is, that if we are elect, we shall be saved, even though we live in all manner of sin; and that if we be not elect, we cannot be saved, even though we live the most holy and blameless life. But that argument, especially the former part of it, is most effectually answered: for God has ordained the means as well as the end: and he has ordained the end no otherwise than by and through the appointed means. God decreed to add fifteen years to the life of Hezekiah: but did this supersede the necessity of his subsisting by daily food? Yet the use of food is not so inseparably connected with the animal life as holiness is with the life of the soul: for Elijah lived forty days, and Moses twice forty days, without food; and God, if he had pleased, might have supported Hezekiah fifteen years without it: but he *cannot* save a man without holiness, because *he has declared he will not*; and “*he cannot lie*,” “*he cannot deny himself*:” and therefore to expect to attain salvation in any other way than that which is here ordained, is to expect from God what he has never promised, and what, so far from having ever ordained, *he has ordained shall never come to pass*: for “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.”

^a 2 Tim. ii. 10.

^b 1 Thess. v. 9.

^c Eph. i. 4. 2 Tim. i. 9.

^d Rom. xi. 5.

^e John xvii. 6, 9, 10, 22, 24.

God had chosen them to salvation "through sanctification of the Spirit." Sanctification is necessary for the enjoyment of heaven. Heaven would afford no happiness to an unsanctified soul. The presence of a holy God would inspire nothing but terror: and an unintermitted engagement in holy exercises would be an insupportable burthen to one who had no taste for them. God therefore has connected sanctification with salvation, in order that the soul on its exaltation to glory may possess a meetness for the enjoyment of it. And, that his people may be sanctified, he sends down his Holy "Spirit" into their souls; and, by the same power whereby he raised the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, raises them from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness. Thus by transforming them into his own image, he fits them for his glory.

Further; he had chosen them to salvation "through a belief of the truth." It is by faith, and by faith alone, that we apprehend the blessings of salvation. By faith we lay hold on the promises of God: by faith we become united to Christ: by faith we bring down from Christ all those supplies of grace which are necessary for us in this state of warfare. We should fall and perish instantly, if we were not armed with "faith, as our shield;" and "hope, as our helmet;" and "the word, as the sword," whereby the Spirit of God enables us to inflict a deadly wound on our enemies. It was by holding fast the written word, that Jesus triumphed over Satan in the wilderness: and by a constant reliance on the word are we also to overcome him. Hence God had ordained for them, as he has for all his people, that they shall attain salvation "through belief of the truth."

Thus are faith and holiness inseparably connected with salvation; and to them are men elected, as much as to salvation itself: so that to hope for heaven in any other way than through a perseverance in these, is an unwarrantable presumption, and will only deceive our own souls.]

Whilst the Apostle traces thus all the blessings of salvation to God's electing love, as their true and only source, he reminds his Thessalonian converts of,
II. Their effectual calling by his ministry to a participation of them—

It is by the word that God imparts his blessings to the souls of men—

[It is by the word that God acts. As far as his providence concurs in the salvation of men, it is only in suberviency to the word^f. The word is "the rod of his strength,"

^f Acts viii. 26—40. and ix. 1—24.

by which all the wonders of his grace are wrought. Miracles gave credibility to the testimony which Christ and his Apostles bore: but it was the testimony itself, as applied by the Holy Spirit to the soul, that wrought effectually upon the hearts of men. And in all ages it is the same word, either read or preached, that is effectual to convert them to God. Hence the Apostle reminds the Thessalonians that, notwithstanding they were from eternity chosen of God to salvation, they were "called" to the possession of it through the ministry of the Gospel which he had preached unto them.]

Wherever that word is received aright, it will operate effectually to the desired end—

[Thus it had wrought on the Thessalonians: it had "turned them from idols to serve the living God^g." And thus it will work on all who cordially embrace it^h. "It is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged swordⁱ." "It is mighty to the pulling down of all the strong-holds of sin and Satan^k." "It invariably accomplishes that which God has pleased, and prospers in the thing whereunto he has sent it^l." It is the instrument whereby God fulfils his eternal counsels in the conversion of men. When the time fixed by him for the bringing home of his wandering sheep is arrived, "he apprehends them" by his word^m, and brings them home with power to his fold, constraining them by his grace, and "making them willing in the day of his powerⁿ." This is his invariable process towards them: "Whom he has predestinated, those he first calls, and then justifies, and then glorifies^o:" he brings them not to the profession of the Gospel merely, but "to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ^p."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have never yet obeyed "the Gospel call"—

[Who these are may be easily ascertained: they have been "called" to a "belief of the truth," even such a belief as should lead them to rely entirely upon the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation; "and to the sanctification of the Spirit," even such a sanctification as should progressively transform them into the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness — — — and, if you have not these marks upon you — — — you are the persons whom I now address.

Say not ye, 'I am not of God's elect, and therefore I cannot

^g 1 Thess. i. 5, 9.

^h Col. i. 6.

ⁱ Heb. iv. 12.

^k 2 Cor. x. 4.

^l Isai. lv. 10, 11.

^m Phil. iii. 12.

ⁿ Ps. cx. 3.

^o Rom. viii. 30.

^p Text.

help myself.' No; ye shall not thus cast the blame of your condemnation upon God. Who has told you, that you are not of God's elect? Who has searched the book of God's decrees, or been told by God that your name is not inserted there? Then you have no right whatever to conclude that you are not elect of God, or to make his supposed decrees any excuse for continuance in sin. On the contrary, I am authorized by Almighty God to declare, that "he is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance and live^q." "He would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth^r." He even confirms this truth with an oath: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he turn from his wickedness and live. Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel^s?" The truth is, as our Lord informs us; "Ye will not come unto me," saith he, "that ye might have life." "Him that should come unto me I would in no wise cast out." Know ye then that the fault is yours, and not God's. Our Lord complains over you, "How often *would I* have gathered you, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but *ye would not!*" Yes; whatever excuses you may now make from the doctrine of election, your mouths shall be stopped in the day of judgment: "*I would, but ye would not.*" Do not reply, that, till God has given you his grace, you cannot come to Christ: for, if you would only attempt in faith to stretch out your withered hand, in the very attempt he would enable you to do it^t. Now then, in the name of Almighty God, I call you to him, and invite you to receive freely at his hands all the blessings of salvation^u— — — And, if ye will not obey the call, your blood shall be upon your own heads.]

2. Those who through grace have obeyed the call—

[Remember, brethren, "who it is that hath made you to differ^x." Ye are "beloved of the Lord." "Ye have not chosen him; but he has chosen you, and ordained you that you should go and bring forth fruit; and that your fruit should remain^y." "Ye love him because he first loved you^z:" "He loved you with an everlasting love; and therefore with loving-kindness hath he drawn you^a." "He loved you," not for any good that he either saw, or foresaw, in you; but simply of his own will, "because he would love you^b." Say then, whether

^q 2 Pet. iii. 9.

^t Matt. xii. 13.

^y John xv. 16.

^b Deut. vii. 7, 8.

^r 1 Tim. ii. 4.

^u Isai. lv. 1—3.

^z 1 John iv. 19.

^s Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

^x 1 Cor. iv. 7.

^a Jer. xxxi. 3.

ye have not reason to thank your God; or rather, whether your every breath should not be an effusion of praise?

But forget not that the path by which alone you can arrive at your desired home is that of faith and holiness. This is the king's "highway^c," by a patient continuance in which you are to "obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." "Hold fast then the faith without wavering;" and pray constantly to God for fresh "supplies of his Spirit," that you may be sanctified throughout, and "be changed into his image from grace to grace, and from glory to glory." Meditate deeply and continually on his word, and treasure it up in your hearts, that you may be "sanctified by the truth^d;" and ever remember, that to the very last it is by the word that the Lord Jesus Christ will perfect his good work within you^e. Thus, whilst "those who loved unrighteousness, and were *therefore* given over to a delusion to believe a lie," are left to the "damnation" which their own sins have merited^f, you shall have all the purposes of God's electing love completed in you, and shall spend an eternity in singing praises "to Him who loved you, and washed you from your sins in his own blood, and hath made you kings and priests unto your God for ever and ever^g."]

^c Isai. xxxv. 8.

^d John xvii. 17.

^e Eph. v. 25—27.

^f ver. 10—12.

^g Rev. i. 5, 6.

MMCCXV.

GOD OUR BENEFACTOR.

2 Thess. ii. 16, 17. *Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.*

IN reading the epistles of St. Paul, we cannot but be struck with the devout and grateful manner in which he introduces, at all times, the mention of Jehovah's name. He almost invariably combines with it some of those perfections which God has displayed in the Gospel of his Son; and expatiates upon them, either as the theme of his adoring gratitude, or as the foundation of all his hopes. And not unfrequently does he unite the Lord Jesus Christ with the Father, as equally entitled to our adoration

with the Father himself, and equally deserving our entire confidence. In the passage before us, both these things are conspicuous: and, that we may bring them clearly before you, we shall endeavour to shew,

I. What a Benefactor we have—

Hear what “God, even our Father, has done for us”—

[Desperate, even as the state of the fallen angels, was the state of man, through the fall of Adam—— But God, “who passed by the angels that sinned,” was pleased, of his unbounded mercy and grace, to make provision for the recovery of man, by the gift of his only-begotten Son, to die in his place and stead —— In truth, “he loved us with an everlasting love^a ;” and, in due season, called us, by his grace, to the knowledge of his dear Son, and enabled us to believe in him; and thus “gave us a good hope” of re-possession of the inheritance which we had forfeited^b —— O what “consolation” does this afford us! Verily, it is “*strong* consolation^c,” yea, and “*everlasting* consolation” too: for not only will it abide with us under all possible afflictions —— but, when all the things of time and sense shall have passed away, and been utterly forgotten, it shall remain for ever, with unabated vigour, on our souls ——]

But in all this “the Lord Jesus Christ himself has also borne his part”——

[He willingly undertook our cause; and never ceased from his labours, till he could say, “It is finished.” Truly he “loved us, and gave himself for us^d :” and, by the operations of his grace upon our souls, and his promises that “none shall ever pluck us out of his hands,” he has “made us to abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost, and has filled us with all joy and peace in believing^e.” Whilst, therefore, we make our acknowledgments to God the Father, we must with equal gratitude trace all our blessings to his only dear Son, by whose transcendent merits alone, and through whose almighty agency, they all flow down unto us ——]

In this intercessory prayer to our heavenly Benefactor, we see,

II. What benefits we may yet further hope for at his hands—

^a Jer. xxxi. 3.

^b 1 Pet. i. 3, 4.

^c Heb. vi. 18.

^d Gal. ii. 20.

^e Rom. xv. 13.

We are yet exposed to many trials, and to great dangers; and shall be so, as long as we continue in the body. But "God will never leave us nor forsake us." On the contrary, his past benefits are a pledge and earnest of future blessings, to the utmost extent of our necessities. He will, under all the circumstances that can ever occur, impart to us,

1. Comfort—

[We carry about with us, and shall to our dying hour be oppressed with, a body of sin and death; such as made St. Paul himself to exclaim, "O wretched man that I am!" ——— Nor can we hope to be freed from the assaults of Satan, even such as Paul complained of, when, with repeated cries, he implored the removal of "the thorn in his flesh," which so sorely pained him ——— But the same "God who comforted him will comfort us with similar consolations;" and, "if our afflictions abound as his did, will make our consolations to abound also^f." And so effectual shall these be, that we shall be enabled to "glory in our tribulations^g," and even to "take pleasure in our infirmities and distresses^h" ———]

2. Stability—

[To serve the Lord with steadfastness and fidelity, in the midst of all the difficulties which we have to encounter, is no easy matter. But "God is able to hold us up: and we shall be upheldⁱ," if we simply rely on him. Yes; "God is faithful to his promises; and he will stablish us, and keep us from evil^k;" and enable us to maintain our integrity before him, both in word and deed ———]

And here let me observe, that it is not from "God the Father" *only* that we may hope to obtain these benefits, but from "the Lord Jesus Christ also, whom the Apostle frequently unites with the Father, as equally the object of our worship, the source of our blessings, the rock of our dependence^l." If we "be strong, it must be in the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the power of his might^m." "His grace," under whatever circumstances, "shall be sufficient for usⁿ:" and if we trust in him, we may confidently say, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me^o" ———]

APPLICATION—

In all your addresses, whether for yourselves or others, at the throne of grace, look to God,

^f 2 Cor. i. 3—5.

^g Rom. v. 3.

^h 2 Cor. xii. 10.

ⁱ Rom. xiv. 4.

^k Rom. iii. 3.

^l Eph. vi. 23. 1 Thess. iii. 11.

^m Eph. vi. 10.

ⁿ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^o Phil. iv. 13.

1. With adoring gratitude—

[It is not possible that you should be in any state, wherein this frame of mind is not called for — — — And think what boldness the recollection of God's undeserved love and unbounded mercies will give you, in your addresses to him — — — Truly, if you had but the slightest sense of what God has already done for you, you could not but find your hearts enlarged towards him; and would "open your mouths wide," whensoever you came into his presence — — —]

2. With humble confidence—

[See how God the Father, and God the Son, and I may add too, God the Holy Ghost, have concurred in all that has already been vouchsafed unto you. For, whether the Father or the Son confer the benefit, it is by the Holy Spirit that it is imparted to you — — — And with such benefactors, each pledged to the other, by an everlasting covenant, to bestow on you whatsoever shall most conduce to your welfare, what can you want? Verily, you shall want no manner of thing that is good. Only cast all your care on your reconciled God in Christ Jesus, and you shall find, to your comfort, that "he is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy^p."]]

^p Jude, ver. 24.

MMCCXVI.

THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL.

2 Thess. iii. 1. *Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you.*

THE light of the material sun is hailed and welcomed by every nation under heaven: but how much more is the light of the Sun of Righteousness to be desired! If the one be necessary for our comfort in this life, the other is necessary to guide us in the way to life eternal. Hence the Apostle not only laboured to spread the Gospel himself, but endeavoured to interest all the Lord's people in its behalf; that by their united supplications they might obtain from God whatever should conduce to its establishment in the world.

In this request of his we see,

I. What we should desire for the word of God—

1. That it should “have free course”—

[It is surprising that any should be averse to the circulation of the Scriptures; or should be jealous of the Scriptures, unless accompanied with human compositions to forestall and determine the judgment of the reader. What is this but to supersede the use of that judgment which God requires us to exercise? yea, what is this, but to return to popery? The Papists locked up the Scriptures in an unknown tongue, and forbade the laity to read them; and sent forth among the people small portions of them only, and counteracted those portions by the most erroneous comments and grossest superstitions. Far be such conduct from Protestants: freely have we received, and freely we should give: nor should we relax our efforts to disseminate the Scriptures, till every human being shall have them in his possession, and be enabled to read in his own native language the wonderful works of God^a.]

2. That it should “be glorified”—

[What is implied in this expression, we are at no loss to determine. We have only to see how it was glorified “*with them*,” *i. e.* the Thessalonian converts, and we have the perfect model of its being glorified amongst ourselves.

In two ways is the word of God glorified; first, *in the conversion of sinners*; and, next, *in the edification and salvation of saints*.

How the Gospel wrought to *the conversion* of the Thessalonians, we are distinctly informed: they received it, “not as the word of man, but as the word of God:” it “came to *them*, not in word only, but in power:” and by it “they were turned from idols to serve the living God^b” — — — Similar effects were produced by it in other churches^c — — — And who must not confess that the word is glorified when such wonders are wrought by it? — — — But that it is so, is expressly affirmed by the voice of inspiration itself^d.

Nor was the Gospel less powerful for their continued *edification*. This was greatly advanced among them, as the Apostle himself testified^e — — — Yet nothing but the pure word of God was, or could be, effectual for this end^f. As the rod of Moses wrought all those miracles in Egypt and the wilderness, so was the Gospel “the rod of God’s strength:” and in the production of such miraculous events,

^a See Ps. xix. 4. and Rom. x. 18.

^b 1 Thess. i. 5, 9. and ii. 13.

^c Acts vi. 7. and xix. 20.

^d Acts xiii. 48, 49.

^e 2 Thess. i. 3, 4. and ii. 13, 14.

^f 1 Pet. ii. 2.

both the word itself, and God in it, were greatly glorified^g: nor is it possible to see such effects yet produced in the hearts and lives of men, without acknowledging, that “he who hath wrought them to the self-same thing is God^h” — — —]

Let us next inquire,

II. How that desire is to be obtained—

The Apostle speaks of himself and all his fellow-labourers, as instruments whereby the Gospel was propagated throughout the world. And the same is true of ministers in all succeeding ages, even to the present day: they are God’s ambassadors to a rebellious world. But the prayers of God’s people are no less necessary than the efforts of his ministers: for it is God alone that can give effect to any exertions; and it is prayer alone that can interest him in our behalf—

[It is God alone that can raise up ministers, or fit them for the workⁱ — — — Hence we are directed to “pray that *God would send forth* labourers into his harvest^k.”

It is God alone that can open places for them to labour in. Men universally of themselves reject the Gospel: but when God opens a door for his servants, no attempts of his enemies can shut it^l — — —

It is God alone that can give success to their endeavours. That same divine power, which first opened the understandings of the Apostles, must open the hearts of others to attend to them^m — — — And then only does the word effect any radical change in men, when it comes “in demonstration of the Spirit, and of powerⁿ.”

Hence St. Paul so earnestly entreated the prayers of the Thessalonian Church, and yet more earnestly the intercessions of the saints at Rome°. God has in mercy made his servants and his people mutually dependent on each other: the people being quickened by the exertions of their ministers; and ministers being strengthened by the prayers of their people: and thus the builders and the building are advanced together, and all are edified in love.]

^g Acts xxi. 19, 20.

^h 2 Cor. v. 5.

ⁱ Rom. x. 15. and 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16. and iii. 5.

^k Matt. ix. 38. Eph. iv. 12, 13.

^l Acts xviii. 10, 11. 1 Cor. xvi. 9. and Rev. iii. 8.

^m Luke xxiv. 45. with Acts xvi. 14.

ⁿ 1 Cor. ii. 4, 5. and iii. 5—7.

° Rom. xv. 30—32.

We CONCLUDE this subject with,

1. A word of admonition—

[Many profess a reference for the Bible, and even display a zeal for conveying the Holy Scriptures to heathen lands, who yet make but little use of it for themselves. But this zeal for the good of others will never be admitted as a substitute for personal religion — — — Many of the religious world also, who study the Bible and profess to love the Gospel of Christ, are far from adorning that Gospel by holy tempers, and by heavenly lives — — — Let such persons look well to themselves; for “not he that saith Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of our Father which is in heaven” — — —]

2. A word of encouragement—

[Let any one see what was effected in the days of old by a few poor fishermen: and take courage to exert himself for God — — — The same power that wrought effectually in that day will concur with us — — — Let us not then despond, as though our weakness were any obstacle to success; for God will display his own power by means of it^p, and “ordain strength in the mouths of babes and sucklings.” Whether therefore we address ourselves to the translation of the Scriptures into foreign languages, or labour for the circulation of them at home, let us only implore help from God, and we shall not be permitted to “labour in vain, or run in vain.”]

P 2 Cor. xii. 9.

MMCCXVII.

ALL MEN HAVE NOT FAITH.

2 Thess. iii. 2. *All men have not faith.*

IF we considered the condition of fallen man, and the merciful provision which God has made for him in the Gospel of his Son, we should think it impossible for any one, who heard the glad tidings of salvation proclaimed to him, not to embrace the offers of mercy, and to bless God for such a marvellous dispensation of his grace. But the fact is, that there is no other thing in the whole world so hated and despised as this very Gospel. Persons of every description combine against it. To the Jews it is

a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness: and multitudes, even of those who profess to receive the sacred records as inspired, are found amongst the enemies of the Gospel: for, as the Apostle justly says, “all men have not faith.”

Let me,

I. Shew to whom this charge applies—

It doubtless comprehended, in the first instance, the Jews, who professed to believe in the One true God. And it also referred to those who, whilst they ostensibly embraced the faith of Christ, were, in reality, no better than hypocrites; deceiving others, and deceiving also their own souls.

Amongst those who have not faith, we may fitly number,

1. Infidels—

[The very term Infidel does, in fact, imply this. Not but that persons of this description would be grievously offended, if you should represent them as no Christians. Yet it is, in fact, their character: for, in holding up to derision the great truths of revelation, they shew, beyond all doubt, that they possess not the faith of Christ.]

2. Formalists—

[These take credit to themselves as having attained a high degree of righteousness. But, whilst they “go about to establish a righteousness of their own, instead of submitting to the righteousness of God which is by faith in Christ^a,” they shew, that they have no just views of the Saviour’s office, or of the salvation which he has wrought out for us by his own obedience unto death. The Gospel which they maintain is “another Gospel^b,” and not that which Christ has revealed, and which his Apostles preached.]

3. Hypocrites—

[How many of these do we read of in the sacred records; men who, having “a form of godliness, denied the power thereof^c!” Of such St. Jude speaks; saying, “Clouds are they without water, carried about of winds; trees, whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wan-

^a Rom. x. 2, 3

^b Gal. i. 6—9.

^c 2 Tim. iii. 5—8.

dering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever^d.”]

If it be thought hard to say, of all these persons, that they have not faith, I will,

II. Adduce evidence in confirmation of it—

Amongst the persons that have been specified, not a few are “unreasonable and wicked men”—

[All of them will, more or less, unite in reviling and persecuting the Gospel of Christ. Though there is no other point in which they are agreed, they will stand together readily and harmoniously upon this ground. Who were greater enemies to the Gospel than “the false brethren” whom St. Paul enumerates among the catalogue of those who sought his life^e? That a profligate and abandoned rabble should seek to destroy him, we do not wonder^f: but that “devout and honourable women” should lend themselves as instruments to persecute him, we should scarcely conceive, did we not know it as a fact recorded by the inspiration of God^g. But the truth is, that no persons under heaven are more adverse to the pure doctrines of the Gospel, and to those who preach it, than the self-righteous Pharisees. The conduct of Paul, previous to his conversion, fully evinces this^h; and the experience of the Church, in all ages, bears witness to it.]

But the true believer is the very reverse of these—

[Compare him with the *Infidel*.—A man who believes in Christ cannot make the truths of revelation a subject of profane mockery: no; he reverences the word of God, and “trembles at it;” and is as much assured, as he is of his own existence, that every jot and tittle of it shall be fulfilled in its season.

Compare him with the *Formalist*.—The believer in Christ, so far from seeing any thing of *merit* in himself, is humbled in the dust, under a sense of his own *demerit*; and, renouncing utterly all dependence on himself, he looks for salvation simply and entirely through Christ alone.

Compare him with the *Hypocrite*.—The believer endeavours as much to fulfil the law, as if he thought he was to be saved by his obedience to it. Could he attain his heart’s desire, he would “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”

Compare him with the “*unreasonable and wicked*” *Persecutor*.—The true Christian has received “a spirit of love, and of power, and of a sound mind:” and, so far from wishing to

^d Jude, ver. 12, 13.

^g Acts xiii. 50.

^e 2 Cor. xi. 26.

^h Gal. i. 13, 14.

^f Acts xvii. 5.

obstruct the Gospel by an envious opposition to those who are more distinguished than himself, he esteems himself "less than the least of all saints," and rejoices in all the good that is done by God's most-favoured servants. Whether, therefore, we view the unbeliever as he is in himself, or as contrasted with a believing soul, the truth of the Apostle's assertion will be placed beyond a doubt.]

APPLICATION—

1. "Examine carefully, whether ye be in the faith" — — —

2. Be careful, also, to shew "forth your faith by your works" — — —

MMCCXVIII.

ST. PAUL'S BENEVOLENCE.

2 Thess. iii. 5. *The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.*

IT might well be expected that the fundamental doctrines of our religion should be found, not only in passages where the truths were expressly insisted on, but in others where they were casually introduced. Accordingly we find this to be the case respecting every important doctrine of the Gospel; but in none more than that which relates to a Trinity of persons in the Godhead. If we wished to convince an unbeliever, we should doubtless select such passages as most plainly contain the doctrine in question^a: but to confirm the mind of a believer, we should rather refer to places where it was only incidentally mentioned: because, if once we see that the idea was familiar to the minds of the inspired writers, and to the minds of those to whom they wrote, we have the strongest proof of which any doctrine is capable. Thus, in the passage before us, the Apostle meant only to express a benevolent wish on behalf of the Church at Thessalonica: but he expressed it in such terms as a person habituated to the doctrine of the

^a e. g. Matt. xxviii. 19. 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

Trinity would naturally use : he prayed that “the *Lord* (the Spirit) would direct their hearts into the love of *God* (the Father), and into the patient waiting for *Christ*.”

The point however to which we would direct your attention, is not so much the terms in which the Apostle's wish is conveyed, as the *objects* and *reasons* of that wish.

I. The objects of that wish—

A very little observation of the world is sufficient to convince us, that “the love of God” is not the predominant passion of mankind ; nor a preparation for Christ's second coming their chief employment.

[Men in general are not so impressed with a view of God's excellency, as to feel any love to him : much less have they obtained such an acquaintance with him, as to enjoy in their souls any sense of his love to them. Nor is there much of “the patience of Christ^b” to be found amongst them. To “deny themselves, and take up their cross, and follow him,” is a lesson which they have never learned. As for looking forward with comfort to the second coming of their Lord, and waiting patiently for it as the completion of their hopes and the consummation of their joys, they know it not. “Their affections are set on things below, rather than on things above ;” and the acquisition of some earthly good is that which alone engages their attention — — —]

But to possess the state of mind described in the text, is essential to the Christian character—

[How can a man be a Christian, and not love his God ? or how can he belong to Christ, and not resemble him, “who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God ?” — — —]

Yet of ourselves we never shall, or can, attain to it—

[The heart is altogether averse to spiritual exercises ; and turns away in disgust from the contemplation of those things which make for our everlasting peace. If we try to fix our minds on the love of God to man, or on the nature and extent of that obedience which we owe to him, or on the solemn account which we must give of ourselves before him, we cannot

^b ὑπομονὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

long keep our attention to such subjects, nor can we get them suitably impressed upon our hearts — — —]

Hence St. Paul prayed, that the Lord, even the Holy Spirit, would direct the hearts of his people into that state—

[It is the province of that Divine Agent to give *a right direction*^c to the heart^d — — — But his influence must be sought by prayer. Nevertheless God will hear also the intercessions of others in our behalf, and give us a supply of his Spirit in answer to them^e — — — In the full persuasion of this, St. Paul poured out the benevolent aspiration which we have been considering.]

Such then were the objects of the Apostle's wish; namely, that the Thessalonian Christians might experience more deeply the truths they professed. Nor are we at any loss to state,

II. The reasons of it—

Among the most important of these were doubtless the two following: he knew that the attainment of such a state was,

1. Highly conducive to their present happiness—

[There is a most absurd prejudice against religion, that it tends to make persons melancholy. That some religious persons are inclined to melancholy, is true enough: but it is not true, that religion makes them so. In all human probability they would have manifested the same disposition (as thousands of others do) if they had never known any thing of religion. As far as religion is concerned, it is from erroneous and distorted views of religion, and not from any just apprehensions of it, that they are rendered melancholy. Where, in all the word of God, do we find this effect ascribed to religion, or arising from it? Peter wept bitterly, and Judas hanged himself: but was it religion, or sin, that was the occasion of their sorrows? not religion surely, but sin. Religion was a balm to Peter, and kept him from despair; and it was Judas's want of religion that drove him to suicide.

But the truth is, that men make this a mere pretext to reject religion: they do not really, in their hours of sober reflection, think that religion has any such tendency. Where will be found a man in the whole universe who really thinks that love to God, or a sense of God's love to him, would make him less happy? — — — Where is there one who really believes

^c κατεβύναλ.

^d Jam. i. 17. 2 Cor. v. 5.

^e Phil. i. 19.

that an habitual preparation for death and judgment would make him less happy? — — — Nay, where is there one who does not in his heart envy a truly pious character, and entertain the secret wish, O that I might be found in that man's place at the day of judgment! — — —

The Apostle knew that the graces which he desired for the Thessalonian Christians would make them truly happy both in life and death. He knew it from the universal tenour of the Holy Scriptures^f — — — and he knew it from his own experience^g — — — and therefore he prayed the Lord to direct their hearts to the attainment of them.]

2. Indispensably necessary to their eternal welfare—

[What is a Christian without the love of God? What pretensions has he to the name of Christian? — — — or how can he call himself a disciple of Christ, who has no delight in following his steps, or in looking forward to his future advent? What an appearance will such an one make at the tribunal of his Judge! Will he not be ashamed before him at his coming? Has he any reason to think that the God whom he never loved, will love him? or that the Saviour whom he never served, will say to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant?" Whatever they may say to the contrary, the careless world have their misgivings even now; they have a secret fear that God will put a difference between those who served him and those who served him not — — — On this subject St. Paul had no doubt — — — and therefore, "knowing the terrors of the Lord, he both persuaded men" to seek these necessary attainments, and implored of God to communicate to them all needful supplies of his Spirit and grace.]

APPLICATION—

Permit me now to express the same benevolent wish respecting you—

[We have no wish to proselyte men to a party, or to lead them into any enthusiastic notions or pursuits. All we desire is, that they should love that God who has so loved them, and be found patiently waiting for the Bridegroom when he shall call them to the marriage. And, I ask, is this unreasonable? Is it any thing more than what I ought to wish; or than you yourselves either do, or will soon, wish for yourselves? — — — Be not offended, then, if we express this wish: be not offended, if we urge upon you what we know will tend so much to your present happiness, and what we are assured is necessary to your happiness in the future world — — —]

^f Ps. lxiii. 5. Matt. v. 3—12.

^g 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

Let me also request that you will adopt this wish for yourselves—

[Surely I shall have spoken to good effect, if only one amongst you all shall be stirred up to pray for himself, “Lord, direct *my* heart into the love of God, and into a patient waiting for Christ.” Happy will it be, if any of you begin to wish that you had loved God, and that you might from this time become objects of his favour. Happy will it be, if any of you begin to say, ‘I will take up my cross and follow Christ: I will follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach. He died for me; O that I might have grace to live and die for him! He is coming to judge me; O that I might be ready for his appearing, and give up my account to him with joy and not with grief!’ — — — Cultivate these desires: beg of God to stir them up in your hearts by his Holy Spirit: and when you have attained a measure of this grace yourselves, cultivate it to the utmost in the hearts of others.]

MMCCXIX.

THE DESIRABLENESS OF PEACE.

2 Thess. iii. 16. *Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means.*

CONTENTIONS too naturally spring from our corrupt nature, the fruitful parent of every thing that is evil. There are indeed occasions when it is necessary to act in a manner that seems not pacific; and *that* too even towards those who call themselves the Lord's people: if, for instance, any member of a christian society were notoriously defective in any one branch of moral duty, and persisted in his misconduct notwithstanding the remonstrances of those who were both authorized and qualified to advise him, it would be necessary to cut off such a corrupt member from the Church, and to cease from all needless or familiar intercourse with him, till he had repented of his wickedness^a. But these are only extreme cases, where milder means will not avail. As a general rule, we should strive to the utmost to walk in peace both towards those who are without,

^a ver. 14.

and them that are within, the Church: the disposition of our hearts should exactly accord with the desire contained in the words before us.

The expressions in the text being general, it is not necessary to limit them to one particular point: we shall therefore take them in the most comprehensive sense as relating,

I. To nations—

[No language can fully express the miseries of war: it turns mankind into ferocious beasts, that seek only to overpower and destroy each other. It spreads desolation over whole countries. It cuts off thousands, and ten thousands in a day; and turns that into an occasion of joy and triumph, which ought rather to overwhelm us with distress and anguish. Even those who are not actively engaged with the enemy, are yet no light sufferers through the burthens which are imposed to support the war, and through the loss of near and dear relatives. Peace is, under God, the remedy of all these evils: not that it can ever repair the losses that have been sustained; but it prevents the progress of these evils, and restores to the world those friendly and commercial relations which war had interrupted^b. O that the governors of all nations did but know how to appreciate this invaluable blessing!

But whence can this blessing be obtained? It should seem that the termination of war depends wholly on the will of the contending parties. This indeed is true in some sense: but who shall make them willing? who shall put an end to their ambitious or vindictive projects? None but HE, “in whose hands are the hearts of kings, and who turneth them whithersoever he will^c.” HE alone can “break the bow, and cut the spear asunder^d.” He who in righteous displeasure has “vexed us with adversity by means of war,” he it is, even “the Lord of peace himself,” who has now caused the din of war to cease, and “given us peace in our borders^e.” O that he might give it us “*always*,” and dispose us to seek it “*by all means!*” Whatever be the terms on which the contending parties have agreed to compose their differences, there will be some found, probably on both sides, to complain of them as below their just expectations. But it were better far to make sacrifices for peace than to persist in a destructive war: and better to exercise forbearance towards an offending enemy, than to precipitate a nation, without the most imperious necessity, into a renewal of such bloody conflicts. Peace retained almost *by any means*, is preferable to the calamities of war.]

^b Mic. iv. 3, 4.

^c Prov. xxi. 1.

^d Ps. xlv. 9. and lxxvi. 3.

^e 2 Chron. xv. 6. with Ps. cxlvii. 14.

II. To societies—

[Scarcely is there any society of men on earth, where feuds and animosities do not awfully prevail. Nor is this true with respect to the unregenerate only; even in the Church of God itself disputes and divisions are too often found^f. But, O! how lamentable is it when the seamless coat of Christ is rent asunder: and the subjects of the Prince of Peace are engaged in mutual hostilities! Surely the most desirable of all blessings to any society whatever, and above all to the Church of Christ, is peace.

But here again recurs the question, Who shall so govern the sinful passions of men as to bring them into habitual subjection? Who shall impose such restraints on all, as to make them “prefer, not every man his own, but every man another’s good^g?” No human wisdom or power can accomplish so great a work. He alone who has united Jews and Gentiles in one body, and slain their enmity, can enable *us* to “preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace^h.” He engaged to make the wolf and the lamb to dwell together in love and amityⁱ; and, when he shall see fit to exert his power, he will realize again what he once accomplished in Noah’s ark, and will unite the most contrary dispositions in the bonds of social affection^k.

Happy are the societies, the families, the Churches, that are governed by such a spirit. Happy indeed if they could “always” enjoy uninterrupted harmony! It is the interest of all the members of a body to forget, as it were, their own individual concerns, and to conspire together for the general good; all using for that end whatever means appear most suitable to the attainment of it. Is forbearance requisite? or friendly rebuke? or even the amputation of an offending member? Every one should be ready to do his part, whatever it may be, and, by his individual exertion, to promote to the utmost the peace and welfare of the whole body. As no means would be left untried for the extinction of flames that threatened the destruction of a city; so should none be omitted, that may secure from injury the union and happiness of mankind^l.

Let all of us then look to “the Lord of peace himself,” that by the influence of his grace these holy dispositions may be wrought within us; and that through the mighty working of

^f 1 Cor. i. 10, 11. and iii. 3.

^g Phil. ii. 4. 1 Cor. x. 24.

^h Eph. ii. 14—17. and iv. 3.

ⁱ Isai. xi. 6—9.

^k The oil poured upon the head of our great High-priest, shall descend to the skirts of his clothing, Ps. cxxxiii. 1, 2.

^l By mutual forbearance, Col. iii. 12—15; by fervent intercession, Ps. cxxii. 6—8.

his Spirit we may every one of us supply our part toward the compacting together of all the members, in order that the whole body may be edified in love^m.]

III. To individuals—

[Whatever be the state of the nation in which we live, or of the society in which our lot is cast, we are concerned at least to obtain peace in our own souls, and to preserve it “*always by all possible means.*” What can ever make us happy if our conscience be disquieted with a sense of guilt, and with apprehensions of God’s wrath? Or, “if God have given us quietness, who, or what, can make troubleⁿ?”

As far as respects inward tranquillity of mind, all are agreed in esteeming it the richest blessing, and in desiring to possess it. But the generality of men are lamentably mistaken with respect to the means by which it is to be obtained. Some hope to find it by dissipating all thoughts of the eternal world: some by silencing all the convictions of their conscience: some by abounding in the external duties of religion: and some by “healing their wounds slightly, and saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace^o.” But true peace can never be obtained but from Jesus, “the Prince of Peace^p.” He it is that has purchased it for his believing people^q; and that has left it them as his best legacy, saying, “Peace I leave with you; my peace give I unto you^r.”

But though this peace is the gift of Christ, we must seek it in the use of means. We must humble ourselves before him for the multitude of our offences; and turn from our transgressions with an unfeigned abhorrence of them. Above all we must view Jesus as making atonement for us, and as reconciling us to God by the blood of his cross. We must renounce all self-righteous methods of appeasing God’s anger, or of pacifying the clamours of a guilty conscience. We must trust in Jesus alone; and in him with our whole hearts^s: and when he has “spoken peace to our souls, we must no more return to folly^t.” Then shall we have that “peace which passeth all understanding,” and enjoy it “*always,*” in life, in death, and for ever.

Let nothing then be esteemed painful that may be necessary for the acquiring or preserving of so rich a blessing; but let us seek it at the Lord’s hands, “*always and by all means^u.*”]

^m Rom. xiv. 19. Eph. iv. 16.

ⁿ Job xxxiv. 29.

^o Jer. vi. 14.

^p Isai. ix. 6.

^q Col. i. 21, 22.

^r John xiv. 27.

^s Isai. xxvi. 3, 4.

^t Ps. lxxxv. 8.

^u By mortification of sin, Isai. lvii. 19—21; by fervent prayer, Phil. iv. 6, 7; by glorifying God with our substance, Isai. lviii. 7—11.

1 TIMOTHY.

MMCCXX.

CHARITY THE TRUE SCOPE OF THE GOSPEL.

1 Tim. i. 5. *Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.*

THE Gospel of Christ is thought by many to be a source of evil : and certain it is, that evils have not unfrequently followed in its train. But we must distinguish between two things, which are very often confounded ; namely, the *cause* of evil, and the *occasion* of evil. There is not any blessing which divine Providence has bestowed upon us, which may not be an *occasion* of evil, if it be not used in the manner, and for the ends for which it was intended. Our corporeal and mental faculties may be all abused, for the production of evil ; and all the fruits of the earth may be made subservient to the gratification of inordinate desire. This has happened in relation to the Gospel. Even in the primitive Churches, some, instead of delivering their divine message with the simplicity that became them, made it, in many instances, an occasion of promulgating their own vain and superstitious notions ; thus administering to strife and contention, where they should have laboured only for the edification of souls in faith and love. St. Paul, in order to correct this, directed Timothy to protest against it, as an abuse of the Gospel ; and to make it appear, that the Gospel was in no respect

to be blamed for these evils ; since, in its own nature, it tended only to love : “ The end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.”

From these words I shall take occasion to shew,

I. What is the true scope of the Gospel, as contrasted with the use too often made of it—

The use too often made of it has been, to spread disputation and division—

[To such a degree did this evil obtain at Ephesus, that St. Paul, when going into Macedonia, was constrained to deprive himself of the comfort of Timothy's society, in order that he, by abiding still at Ephesus, might charge the teachers to confine themselves to the great truths of the Gospel, instead of “ giving heed to fables and endless genealogies,” as they were wont to do ; “ whereby they ministered to vain questions, rather than to godly edifying^a.” This lamentable evil prevailed also at Colosse ; and, more or less, in all the Churches. Jewish converts would insist upon some favourite observances of their law, which was now abrogated and annulled : and the Gentile converts strove to blend with the Gospel the notions of their philosophers : so that the Apostle was constrained to guard the people against both the one and the other ; bidding them to “ beware, lest any man should spoil them through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ^b.”

In every subsequent age, the Church has been torn and rent with heresies of different kinds ; so that, in fact, the history of the Church contains rather a record of successive contentions between different parties in it, than any account of practical and experimental piety. The smallest knowledge of ecclesiastical history will suffice to convince us of this deplorable fact.

And what is the state of things at this day ? Is there any thing like unity in the Church of Christ ? The seamless garb of our adorable Saviour is rent into a thousand pieces. On all the leading subjects of doctrine and of discipline, there is in the Church, not merely a diversity of sentiment, but a violent hostility ; whole Churches anathematizing each other, and individuals ready to “ bite and devour one another ” as enemies to the public weal. Nor is this acrimony confined to those who differ on fundamental points, as Papists and Protestants : it obtains equally amongst those who are agreed in professing the reformed religion ; and sets at a distance from each other

^a ver. 3, 4.

^b Col. ii. 8, 16—19.

the Calvinist and Arminian, the Churchman and Dissenter, as if there were no common bond of union for them in Christ Jesus. This is cast in our teeth by the Papist, from whom we have separated: and it lays a stumbling-block before the Jew; who, with some shadow of justice, says to us, "Call not on me to embrace your religion, till you are yourselves agreed what that religion is."]

But the proper end of the Gospel is charity—

[“The commandment” of which the text speaks, is, by some, supposed to mean the *law*; and, by others, *the particular injunction* given by St. Paul to Timothy. But its connexion with “the pure heart, and good conscience, and unfeigned faith,” from which “the charity, which is its end,” proceeds, clearly shews, in my judgment, that it must be understood of the *Gospel*^c.

Now the end of the Gospel is love; its chief object being to bring man back again to the state in which he was originally formed, and to renew him after the image of God, whose name and nature is love^d. Fallen man possesses it not: he is by nature altogether selfish; and whatever stands in the way of self-gratification and self-advancement, he hates. Hence man universally opposes his fellow-man, as soon as ever a prospect opens to him of promoting his own interests, though at the expense of his neighbour's welfare. In nations, whether civilized or uncivilized, this universally appears. The same is found in rival societies; yea, to such a degree does this malignant spirit operate, that it is a miracle if even a single family be found altogether united in love. But these malignant passions are mortified and subdued by the Gospel; according to that prediction of the Prophet Isaiah: “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them^e.” In confirmation of this truth, we need only look to the day of Pentecost, and see what a change was wrought on the most malignant characters that ever disgraced our fallen nature: three thousand of them, who had but a few hours before concurred in shedding the Saviour's blood, became all of one heart and one mind, and gladly surrendered all that they possessed, with a view to the welfare of the whole body^f. Not that the Gospel will prevent all difference of sentiment amongst men; for, constituted as the human mind is, and different as are the degrees of man's

^c The use of the expression *ἵνα παραγγείλῃς* in ver. 3. by no means determines the import of *τῆς παραγγελίας* in ver. 5: such a change in the use of the same word being quite common with St. Paul.

^d 1 John. iv. 8, 16.

^e Isai. xi. 6—9.

^f Acts ii. 44, 45.

information upon different subjects, it is not possible that all men should have precisely the same views, even of any subject, and much less of all; but it will induce a mutual forbearance, in reference to things that are dubious and non-essential; and will form all the variously-constructed members into one harmonious and compact body^g. And unless it have this effect, it leaves us without any hope of its ultimate and eternal blessings^h.]

It is of great importance, however, to be informed,

II. When that end may be said to be truly and properly attained—

The love here spoken of is not that which exists in the bosom of the natural man; nor is it that which is engendered by a party-spirit: it is a love formed by the Gospel, through the instrumentality of “a pure heart, and a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.” Such is the account given of it in the text; and it is of importance to observe the order in which these words are introduced. “A pure heart” is first mentioned, as being the proximate cause of love: in the production of which, “a good conscience” operates as a more remote cause; whilst its primary cause, which sets the others in motion, is, “an unfeigned faith.”

These are the immediate effects of the Gospel—

[The Gospel, bringing home conviction to the soul, creates there “an unfeigned faith,” without which no one of its truths can be received aright. The faith that is insincere, like that of Simon Magusⁱ, will soon betray its worthlessness; nor can it ever prevail for the subjugation of our selfish propensities. But when the Gospel leads us to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ in all his offices, and to look for salvation through him alone, then it will bring with it “a good conscience,” purged from all sense of guilt, and filled with a peace that passeth all understanding. Thence will flow a purification of the heart from every thing that is “earthly, sensual, or devilish,” and a transformation of the soul into the Divine image. Only let a man so embrace “the promises” as to obtain peace with God, and he will instantly begin to “cleanse himself from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in

^g Eph. iv. 15, 16.

^h 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

ⁱ Acts viii. 13, 18—20.

the fear of God^k." Having a good hope that he is "accepted in Christ," he will labour to purify himself, even as Christ is pure^l."]

Then, through the combined influence of these, it works its destined end—

[The soul is, by nature, narrow and contracted: its desires both originate in self, and end in self. Self is its centre and circumference. The natural man will indeed assume, on many occasions, an appearance of generosity; but, of the "charity that suffereth long, and is kind; that envieth not; that vaunteth not itself; that doth not behave itself unseemly; that seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil: rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; that beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things^m;" of that charity, I say, he knows nothing. But the Gospel expands the soul; filling it with a sense of the Saviour's love, and stirring it up to a holy imitation of it; and bringing home to it, with irresistible force, this blessed truth, "If God so loved us, we ought also to love one anotherⁿ." Thus, at the same time that it *disposes the soul for love*, it also *forms love in the soul*. It brings men into the closest union with the Lord Jesus Christ, and with each other in him, so as to make of all "one body in Christ." All look to him as their common head; and all regard each other as members of the same mystical body; and, in consequence of that union, are penetrated with a love that is reciprocal and universal. The degree of affection that is experienced by them is unknown in the whole world besides. The union, that from thenceforth subsists between them, is so close, that nothing short of the union between Almighty God and his only dear Son can adequately describe it. This is what the Lord Jesus Christ himself has affirmed: "I pray for them, that they all may be one, *as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may all be one in us*. And the glory which thou hast given me, I have given them, that *they all may be one, even as we are one*; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one^o."

This, then, may suffice to shew us, not only what the true end of the Gospel is, but when that end may be said to be truly and properly attained: for it never is truly wrought in us, till we are brought into this union with each other in Christ, and are made to exercise the dispositions which must necessarily result from it.

That I may not be thought to have insisted too strongly on this matter, let me confirm it from the express declaration of

^k 2 Cor. vii. 1.

^l 1 John iii. 3.

^m 1 Cor. xiii. 4—7.

ⁿ 1 John iv. 10, 11.

^o John xvii 21—23

an inspired Apostle; a declaration in which not only the same truth is maintained, but *the very same process is accurately described*. St. Peter, speaking to his believing brethren throughout all the world, says, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth, through the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently^p."]]

Let me now ADDRESS a few words to you on the subject of the Gospel,

1. In reference to its primary operations—

[The peculiar process here described is not alike visible in all: in some it advances rapidly; in others with a more tardy step. But it must be found in all.

Brethren, see to it, that "your faith" in the Gospel be "unfeigned." It must be such a faith as brings you, in penitential sorrow and utter self-renunciation, to the foot of the Cross; and causes you to "live altogether by faith in the Son of God, as having loved *you*, and given himself for *you*^q." See to it, also, that you obtain "a good conscience." There must not be a day or an hour in which you do not apply "the blood of sprinkling" to your souls: for it is by that only that "your conscience can be purged from dead works to serve the living God^r." Take care, too, that your heart be purified from all "earthly, sensual, and devilish" affections. No evil whatever must be harboured in your bosom. The whole of your life must be occupied in "putting off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and in putting on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness^s." These things are absolutely indispensable: and if the Gospel produce them not in your souls, it is in vain for you to expect any blessing from it in the world to come — —]

2. In reference to its ultimate effect—

[Never forget what is the great scope and end of all: it is not to save your soul from *destruction*, but to save your soul from *sin*. Heaven is a region of love: and no man could be happy there who has not been previously "rendered meet for it" in this world. He would be out of his element: he would have no delight in God himself, nor any sympathy with those who were around his throne. Away, then, with selfishness, and apathy, and party-spirit; and begin to realize a heaven upon earth. This is the way to fulfil the law^t; this is the

^p 1 Pet. i. 22.

^q Gal. ii. 20.

^r Heb. ix. 14. and xii. 24.

^s Eph. iv. 22—24.

^t Gal. v. 14.

way to adorn the Gospel^u; this is the way to answer all God's purposes of love towards you. Remember this, then, I pray you. And as I am "charged of God to teach no other doctrine among you^x," so I must charge you, in the name of God, to receive no other amongst yourselves. You will find persons without number ready to obtrude upon you some matters of doubtful disputation; yea, and within your own bosoms you will find much to contend with that is contrary to love. But set the Lord Jesus Christ before you. See how love burned in his bosom, till "his zeal had even consumed him," and till he had surrendered his life upon the cross^y. So grow ye up into him in all things: and as ye have been taught of God to "love one another, see that ye increase more and more^z."]]

^u Gal. v. 6.^x ver. 3.^y John xiii. 1. Eph. v. 2.^z 1 Thess. iv. 1, 9, 10.

MMCCXXI.

THE LAW GOOD, IF USED ARIGHT.

1 Tim. i. 8. *We know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully.*

TO live under the government of laws that are wisely enacted and well administered, is a blessing of no ordinary kind. But the best of laws, if perverted to ends which were never contemplated by the legislature, may be made sources and instruments of the most grievous oppression. In like manner, even the law of God itself may be abused, and, through the perversion of it, be made injurious to the souls of men. Of this there is abundant evidence in the passage before us; where we find persons turning the Scriptures into an occasion of dispute; and occupying themselves with subjects which ministered to "vain jangling," rather than to "edification in the faith of Christ^a." This, however, afforded no just objection to the law itself; for that was good, and "must ever be good, if only it be used lawfully," according to the ends for which it was given.

^a ver. 4, 6.

In confirming the Apostle's assertion, I shall consider it,

I. In reference to the law which belonged exclusively to the Jewish people—

The Jewish dispensation itself was good, as being well adapted to the persons to whom it was given, and for the purposes for which it was established. God intended to keep the posterity of Abraham a separate and distinct people; and, in due time, to bring forth from them, and in the midst of them, the promised Messiah. For this end were ordinances given to them; even such ordinances, as, if observed, must prevent them from ever becoming blended with the other nations of the earth. Still, if this dispensation were regarded as of universal and perpetual obligation, its excellence would wholly disappear.

But, to speak more particularly of *the whole Ceremonial Law*, which formed the great line of distinction between them and others; *this* was good:

It was good, I say, if used lawfully—

[The ceremonial law was intended to *shadow forth the mysteries* of the Gospel, *the privileges* of the Gospel, *the duties* of the Gospel; and thereby to *prepare men for the Gospel* itself.

Does the Gospel hold forth to us the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, and his substitution in the place of sinful man, and the reconciliation effected between God and man by the blood of his cross? Does it declare, that, by the operation of the Spirit of God upon the soul of man, the most polluted of sinners may be sanctified and saved? All this was shadowed forth by the special presence of the Deity in the most holy place; by the sacrifices offered upon the altar; by their blood sprinkled upon the mercy-seat; and by all the various lustrations and sprinklings which were appointed for the cleansing of the offerers, and of every thing connected with them. Even the offices of Christ were distinctly marked: as the Sacrifice, he bled, whilst, as the great High Priest, he offered up himself; and with his own blood he entered within the vail, there to offer up continual intercession in behalf of those for whom he died. The more this subject is prosecuted, the more excellent will that law appear, which so minutely exhibited every part of this *mysterious dispensation* — — —

The *privileges* too, that are enjoyed by means of the Gospel,

are no less clearly marked. For here we see the offender transferring to his victim all his guilt; and liberated from the judgments to which, on account of his transgressions, he had been exposed. Whatever his offence had been, we see him bringing an appropriate offering, which God had promised to accept; and not only receiving a personal absolution on every different occasion, but annually, on the great day of atonement, having the pardon sealed on his soul, in common with every other offender in the whole nation.

Nor was he less instructed in *the path of duty* by this law which God had given him. The whole life of faith and holiness was here held forth to him. He was taught to approach his God on all occasions through a Mediator; to trust altogether to the blood of the sacrifice that was offered for him; and to expect the renovation of his soul through those very ordinances by which he was reconciled to God. The water which was sprinkled on him, in conjunction with the blood, taught him, that sanctification must be sought no less than pardon, and that those who obtained remission of their sins must henceforth walk in newness of life.]

Yet, if used unlawfully, its goodness was destroyed—

[Many there were who relied upon the outward act which had been prescribed, instead of looking, through the act, to Him whom it shadowed forth: many also put the observance of their ceremonies in the place of morality itself; laying a great stress on some trifling matter, whilst they disregarded the weightier and indispensable duties of “judgment, mercy, and faith^b.” Now, this was an abuse of the law, which was never intended for such ends as these. For “how could the blood of bulls and of goats ever take away sin?” or how could sacrifice ever be accepted in the place of mercy^c? To make such an use of the law as this, was to “frustrate the grace of God, and to make the very death of Christ himself in vain^d.” Hence God himself, when he found how the law was perverted, spake of it in the most contemptuous terms^e. St. Paul also represents it as consisting of “weak and beggarly elements^f,” and as “disannulled on account of the weakness and unprofitableness thereof^g.”]

Let us further consider our text,

II. In reference to the law; which, though given by God himself to the Jews, belongs equally to the whole world—

^b Matt. xxiii. 23.

^c Matt. xii. 7.

^d Gal. ii. 21.

^e Isai. lxvi. 3.

^f Gal. iv. 9.

^g Heb. vii. 18.

It is of the Moral Law that the Apostle principally speaks in my text: for it was that law which forbade all the different kinds of immorality which he proceeds to specify^h. And this law was not, so to speak, “made for the righteous,” but, as all human laws are, for the prevention of evil: and hence, with the exception of the fourth commandment, the whole Decalogue consists of prohibitions, rather than commands; and tells us rather what we are *not* to do, than what we *are* to do.

Now this law also is good, if used lawfully—

[It is good, in that it restrains us from the commission of evil, whether towards God or man. It is good, also, in that it shews how much sin has abounded in the world, and what reason we all have to humble ourselves on account of it. It is good, in that it points out to us the necessity of a Saviour, and leads us to welcome that Saviour to our hearts. Still further it is good, in that it directs us how to walk and to please God, when we have obtained mercy with him through his dear Son. These are the proper uses for which it was designed: and, when improved for these ends, we may well account it “dearer to us than thousands of silver and goldⁱ” — — —]

But, if perverted, even this also ceases to be good—

[True, *in itself* it is, and ever must be, “holy, and just, and good^k,” but, in its use, it proves an occasion of death to many souls. Many there are who seek to establish a righteousness for themselves, by their obedience to it. But to fallen man it never could answer any such end as this: and to attempt to make any such use of it, to set aside the whole Gospel, and to make void all that Christ has done and suffered for us, in this very way it proved fatal to millions amongst the Jews^l, and still becomes an occasion of death to millions amongst ourselves^m. If we will follow it as “a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ,” it will prove an inestimable blessing to our souls: but if we will set it up against Christ, and found our hopes of salvation on our obedience to it, we shall despoil it of its true excellence, and make it only a stumbling-block to our eternal ruin.]

^h ver. 9, 10.

ⁱ Ps. cxix. 72.

^k Rom. vii. 12.

^l Rom. ix. 31, 32.

^m Gal. v. 4.

Having thus explained the Apostle's assertion, I will now endeavour to point out *the proper bearings* of it, in a few REFLECTIONS.

1. How inexpedient is it for novices to dogmatize in matters of religion !

[It was in a way of reproof to such persons, that the Apostle uttered the words before us. There were some who "desired to be teachers of the law, whilst yet they understood not what they said, nor whereof they affirmedⁿ." Now, such persons there are in the Church at all times: and, in fact, there are no persons more dogmatical than those who have espoused some favourite theory of religion; nor is there any subject whatever on which men express greater confidence than this. And what is the consequence? They are given to "vain jangling;" and all their conversation is on subjects which, when so treated, can never administer to "godly edifying." Earnestly would I entreat all persons, and especially those who are but novices in religion, to remember, that they have yet much to learn; and that they need to be well instructed themselves, before they presume to make their own sentiments a standard for all around them.]

2. How absurd is it to condemn religion for the faults of those who profess it !

[The persons whom the Apostle reprov'd, had abused the law. But did the Apostle account the law itself responsible for them? No: he said, and said with confidence, "We *know* that the law is *good*, if a man use it lawfully:" and, if he use it unlawfully, it is *he*, and not the *law*, that is to be blamed. So, then, do I say in relation to religion itself. I will grant, that, amongst those who profess it, there are still many who are full of pride, and conceit, and uncharitableness, and a thousand other evils, just as there were in the Apostle's days. But must religion itself therefore be condemned? As well might you condemn religion for Judas' sake. Learn to judge righteous judgment. You do not condemn reason, because some pervert it in support of error, and assume to themselves the title of rational Christians: neither, then, should you think the less favourably of religion, because some, under its sacred guise, indulge unholy and injurious dispositions. If, indeed, it generated, or even sanctioned, any thing that was unholy, it might well be an object of reproach: but if it inculcate only what is good, then let it have the praise that is due unto it, and those who violate it bear the blame of their own ungodliness.]

ⁿ ver. 7.

3. How necessary is it to distinguish justly between the use, and the abuse, of that which is in itself good!

[The world is good, to one who makes the proper use of it: and therefore we are told to “use the world as not abusing it.” So the law is good, and the Gospel also, if used lawfully; and, as I have said, neither of them is to be condemned on account of the faults or follies of those who profess a regard for them. But you will ask, perhaps, *What is the legitimate use of the Law? and what of the Gospel?* I answer, The *Law* must be used *evangelically*; and the *Gospel practically*. Then will they subserve the best of purposes, and be instrumental in effecting all for which they have been given. But if the Gospel be not kept in view whilst we pay attention to the Law, we shall never attain the liberty of God’s children, nor ever possess the kingdom which he has prepared for us. So also, if we separate holiness from the Gospel, we shall lose all the benefits which the Gospel is intended to convey: for God has expressly ordained, “that without holiness no man shall see the Lord.”]

4. How desirable is it to make a just improvement of every word of God!

[As the law is capable of a right use, so is every word of God. We are not to take one part of the inspired volume, and to leave another; not to embrace one doctrine because it is agreeable to our minds, and to reject another because it offends our prejudices. Earnestly would I guard you against that. The law bids you, “Do, and live:” the Gospel says, “Believe, and be saved.” Set them in opposition to each other, and you will fall into a fatal error: but take the one in subserviency to the other, and all will be well. So would I say respecting many other points, which have been made grounds of controversy and contention for hundreds of years. Only let the different declarations of Scripture find their proper place, and be improved to their proper end, and numberless difficulties will vanish; and the whole system of divine truth will be found harmonious, even as the stars which move in their orbits. To a superficial observer, the various truths may appear to clash; but to one that is conversant with the design of God in them, they will all be found to promote his glory, and to advance the welfare of those who, with childlike humility, embrace them. I mean not to say that you are to take any thing without examination: for you are to “prove all things, and then hold fast that which is good.” But look for the practical use of every thing that the Scriptures contain, and then will you derive benefit from all, and have reason to bless your God for all.]

MMCCXXII.

NATURE AND OFFICE OF THE GOSPEL.^a1 Tim. i. 11. *The glorious Gospel of the blessed God.*

THE words which I have just read, being only an incomplete member of a sentence, without any definite sense, must be considered only as a motto to what I shall have occasion to advance, and not as a foundation whereon any statement is to be established. The Apostle is exhorting Timothy to check those false teachers, who, under a professed zeal for the Law, in reality undermined the Gospel: some, by insisting only on frivolous questions respecting the law; and others, by making it the ground of a sinner's hope before God. All of these desired to be teachers of the law, whilst "they understood not what they said, nor whereof they affirmed." The law, properly explained, was good, even as the Gospel itself: they were in perfect harmony with each other: for the Gospel condemned sin as much as the law itself could do, and inculcated holiness as strongly; and, in this view, it deserved that honourable appellation here given it, "The glorious Gospel of the blessed God." In fact, the Law and the Gospel were one great whole; and, when viewed aright, contributed equally, though in different ways, to advance the honour of God and the welfare of mankind.

The law, with its proper and legitimate uses, I have, on a former occasion, considered. The Gospel is that to which I would wish to draw your attention throughout the present course: and, for the purpose of introducing it to your view, I have selected the very striking expression by which it is here characterized.

The Gospel is called, by the Apostle, "the Gospel of the grace of God^b;" because it reveals God's purposes of love and mercy towards sinful man. He calls it also "the Gospel of salvation^c;" because,

^a The reader is recommended to read the Sermons on Gal. iii. 19. in connexion with, and immediately *before*, these. The two together contain one *continuous* exhibition of the LAW and GOSPEL.

^b Acts xx. 24.

- ^c Eph. i. 13.

whilst it reveals a salvation from God, it imparts that blessing to all who truly receive it. But the designation given to it in the passage before us is pre-eminently grand and beautiful; and will properly lead me to take a view of the Gospel in all its boundless extent, and to mark in succession, its nature and office—its riches and fulness—its suitableness and sufficiency—its excellency and glory.

And may God of his infinite mercy so reveal it to our minds, and bring it home with efficacy to our hearts, that it may prove “the power of God to the salvation” of all who hear it!

To investigate *the nature and office* of the Gospel, will be sufficient to occupy us at this time.

To understand the Gospel aright, we must contemplate,

- I. The state in which it finds us;
- II. The provision which it makes for our deliverance from that state; and,
- III. The means which it prescribes for our participation of its blessings.

I. The state in which it finds us—

Man is not in the state in which he was first created. He was formed at first, in the very image of his God; pure as God himself is pure; and perfect, according to his capacity, as God himself is perfect. But Adam fell; and his children, descending from him in his fallen state, could not but partake of his corruption: for the Scripture saith, “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean^d?” Now, to mark clearly and distinctly the condition of fallen man, is of the utmost importance; because the knowledge of that lies at the root of all true religion. The Scriptures declare it with the utmost simplicity: and, if we receive with humility the declarations of God respecting it, we shall gain an insight into the whole Gospel, which is, in fact, a provision of God for the necessities of man.

^d Job xiv. 4.

Now, there are two things which characterize the condition of fallen man ; namely, *guilt*, and *weakness* : as the Apostle has said, “ While we were yet *without strength*, in due time Christ died for the *ungodly*”^e.

Let us then contemplate these two points, the *sinfulness* of fallen man, and his *weakness*.

Exceeding great is the depravity of our fallen nature. In every faculty of our mind we are corrupt ; nor less so in every member of our body. Our understanding is dark ; our will perverse ; our affections sensual ; our conscience partial ; our very memory indisposed for the retaining of heavenly truths. And our bodies, being altogether under the influence of a depraved mind, are corrupt in all their parts ; every member, instead of ministering unto holiness, being a willing “ servant of sin, and an instrument of unrighteousness unto iniquity.” St. Paul not only states this, but accumulates a great number of passages of Holy Writ to illustrate and confirm his statement : and, with a most remarkable particularity, specifies our members, as it were from head to foot, as involved in the general calamity, and as contributing, according to their respective powers, to bring into effect every evil disposition of the mind : “ We have proved,” says he, “ both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin : as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one : there is none that understandeth ; there is none that seeketh after God : they are all gone out of the way : they are together become unprofitable ; there is none that doeth good, no, not one : their *throat* is an open sepulchre ; with their *tongues* they have used deceit ; the poison of asps is under their *lips* : whose *mouth* is full of cursing and bitterness : their *feet* are swift to shed blood : destruction and misery are in their ways ; and the way of peace have they not known : there is no fear of God before their eyes.” And this description he gives in order to shew that “ every

^e Rom. v. 6.

mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God^f.”

With equal force the Scriptures mark the incapacity of man to restore himself either to the favour or the image of God. So far is man from being able to recommend himself to God, that “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is evil, only evil continually^g.” Nor can he of himself return to God; since it is “God alone who can give him either to will, or to do, any thing that is good^h.”

I forbear to expatiate upon this; because, as I am anxious not to overstate the necessities of man, so I am desirous that all which I do state should be as far as possible in the words of God himself.

Yet I would observe, that this statement, brief as it is, ought to be well understood, and well considered: for, unless we clearly discern the necessities of man, we can never duly appreciate the provision which God has made for the relief of them. In truth, we cannot better understand the necessities of man, than by comparing his condition with that of the fallen angels. They, when they had contracted guilt, were unable to remove it; and, when they had lost the divine image in which they were created, were unable to restore it: and, having no provision made for them by God himself, they are left to endure the penalty of their transgression, in endless, irremediable misery. And I am not aware of even a shadow of difference between them and us *in this respect*, except so far as the sovereign grace of God, in which *they* found no interest, has interposed for *us*. I think this is the very truth before God; nor can I conceive that any one of a candid mind can entertain a doubt respecting it. But, if this were really felt, our work in establishing the truth of the Gospel would have no difficulties to encounter. It is the pride of the human heart which interposes the great obstacle to men’s reception of the Gospel. They are averse to see the extent of their necessities: they will contend for some

^f Rom. iii. 9—19.

^g Gen. vi. 5.

^h Phil. ii. 13.

remnant of goodness or power in themselves, that shall lessen their obligations to the grace of God. But let a man acknowledge himself as wholly and for ever lost, and then he will be prepared to hear of a Saviour, and to embrace the salvation that is provided for him in the Gospel.

II. What provision God has made for our recovery comes now, in the second place, to be considered.

Are we in a state of *guilt*? God has provided a Substitute and a Surety for us, in the person of his dear Son. Are we in a state of *weakness*? God has provided all needful strength for us, in the operations of his Holy Spirit. I might here enter at large into all the offices of Christ, as the Prophet, Priest, and King of his Church; and unfold all the offices of the Holy Spirit, who has undertaken to work in us the whole work of God, and, by his all-powerful influence, to “perfect in our souls all that concerns us.” But it is my wish to simplify every thing; and to exclude from my discussion every thing which, however instructive, may have the effect of diverting the mind from the main object—the beauty and simplicity of the Gospel. Let us, then, limit our views of the Saviour and of the Holy Spirit to the two points which we have mentioned; and mark distinctly the way in which the one removes our guilt, and the other our weakness.

When no possible way remained for man to make compensation to the Deity for the guilt he had contracted, God was pleased to give his only dear Son, to stand in our place, and, by his own vicarious sufferings, to expiate our guilt. For this end, God prepared for him a body in the womb of a pure virgin; that so, whilst he should partake of our nature, he should neither be involved in the guilt of our progenitor, nor inherit his corruption. So far as our sinless infirmities were concerned, God made him like unto us: but so far as any thing of corruption was concerned, he made him perfectly without sin: for, if he had had any sin of his own, he could not have been a fit

person to take away sin from us: if he must be a victim for the sins of others, he must himself be without spot or blemish. Thus, in the person of the Lord Jesus, were united both God and man. In his own nature he was God equal with the Father, even “God over all, blessed for everⁱ.” By assuming our nature into union with his own, he became capable of suffering in our place and stead. And he did suffer in our place; for we are expressly told, that “God laid on him the iniquities of us all^k.” Nor did he only suffer the penalties of the broken law, which, without his merciful intervention, we must have endured for ever; but he fulfilled, in its utmost possible extent, all its holy precepts, and thereby wrought out a righteousness for us, “a righteousness which might be imputed to all, and put upon all, those who should believe in him^l.” As for considering *how* all this could be; *how* God could become a man; *how* he could stand in our place and stead; *how* he could, by his vicarious sufferings, atone for sin; *how* such a plan could avail for affecting a reconciliation between God and man; and *how* God can accept man through a righteousness not his own, but wrought out for him by another, and imputed to him; and *how* God’s perfections can be reconciled and glorified in such a way of saving man; these are questions which God alone can resolve: it is sufficient for us to know, that God has provided such a way for the removal of our guilt; and that “of those who come to him in his Son’s name, not one shall ever be cast out^m.” We sum up, therefore, this part of our subject in the inspired declaration, which we are commissioned to proclaim to the whole world, that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto themⁿ.”

But, to remedy our weakness, a commission also was given to the Third Person in the ever-blessed

ⁱ Rom. ix. 5.

^k Isai. liii. 6.

^l Rom. iii. 22.

^m John vi. 37.

ⁿ 2 Cor. v. 18, 19.

Trinity, to reveal the Saviour to us, and to “fulfil in us all the good pleasure of his goodness” for our full and final salvation. Our incapacity to save ourselves was, in fact, like that of a body actually dead. So far as relates to *spiritual* feeling or power, we are altogether destitute either of the one or the other. Of *natural* feelings or powers, I forbear to speak: they may be carried to any extent; and it will make no difference in my positions. I would not degrade man below what he really is: I am willing to allow him all that any man can reasonably wish. It is of *spiritual* powers alone that I speak; and in relation to them I say, that man is altogether “dead in trespasses and sins^o.” But the Spirit of God undertakes to quicken us by his Almighty power: and it is by his power alone, even by “the working of that mighty power which raised Christ himself from the dead,” that any soul of man attains the least disposition to serve and honour God. Having quickened our souls, the Holy Spirit proceeds to discover to us the extent of our necessities, and to humble us under a sense of them. Then he stirs us up to cry unto our God: then he reveals the Saviour to us (for it is his office to “glorify Christ;” and to “take of the things that are Christ’s, and to shew them unto us”). He then enables us to exercise faith in Christ, and to receive him for all the ends and purposes for which he has been sent. He then fills us with a principle of love to Christ, and constrains us to live unto him. He enables us progressively to mortify all our sinful propensities, and to honour God by a holy conversation. In this way he transforms us gradually into the Divine image, and makes us “meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.”

For the same reason that I forbore to enter more fully into the offices of Christ, I forbear to expatiate upon the different offices of the Holy Spirit. This is a subject which would occupy an entire course of sermons by itself; and, if I should ever live to address another course to this assembly, would

^o Eph. ii. 1.

^p John xvi. 14.

complete my series^a. But, be that as it may, my object on the present occasion is to simplify every thing, that my subject, from beginning to end, may be clearly seen, and fully comprehended.

As to any nice speculations relative to the mode of the Spirit's agency, they would be altogether beside my purpose. It is sufficient to say, that no man, who believes the Holy Scriptures, can doubt of the Holy Spirit being sent of God to apply to the souls of men the redemption which Christ has wrought out for them; and that if ever we have "access to God, it must be *through Christ*, and *by the Spirit*^r." It is for this end that the Spirit is given; and this end he will accomplish in all who implore his aid.

III. Now we are come to our third point; which is, to shew the means which the Gospel prescribes for our participation of its benefits.

The first thought which occurs to men is, that they must do something to *merit* and to *earn* salvation. But, if we consider the condition of our first parents after the fall, we shall see how vain must be such a conceit, how fallacious such a hope. What could they do to recommend themselves to their offended God? As for doing any thing to merit the gift of God's only dear Son, and the influences of the Holy Spirit upon their souls, it is obvious that no such idea could, by any possibility, enter into their minds. What can the fallen angels, at this instant, do to merit a restoration to God's favour? Yet *they* are as capable of it as *we*.

But it may be said, that now God, of his own mercy and grace, has given us a Saviour, we must do something to deserve an interest in him. What then, I would ask, can we do? Our blessed Lord has told us, that "without him we can do nothing^s;" so that the communication of his grace must precede,

^a This is done in a Course of Sermons on Rom. viii. 9. which the reader should peruse after these.

^r Eph. ii. 18.

^s John xv. 5.

not follow, the performance of any good act whatever: and, consequently, we must be indebted altogether to the sovereign grace of God, which first “gives us to will, and then to do, of his good pleasure.”

The truth is, as the first gift of a Saviour sprang altogether from the sovereign grace of God, so must salvation in all its parts; seeing that “we have not of ourselves a sufficiency even to think a good thought^t.” It is by faith alone that the good work of salvation must be wrought in us. We must first believe God’s record respecting his dear Son: then, in the exercise of the same faith, we must look to his Son for the communication of his purchased benefits. So, throughout our whole continuance on earth, “the life which we live in the flesh, we must live by faith in the Son of God, who has loved us, and given himself for us^u.” Let any one reflect, for a moment, What other way is there for any soul of man to participate the benefits which God has treasured up for us in his dear Son? Is there any other way of our being united to him, “as branches of the living Vine;” or of our “receiving out of his fulness the grace” that we stand in need of? is there any other way, I say, than by faith? If we look into the Scriptures, we shall find that faith is continually represented as the means whereby alone we can either receive from God any spiritual blessing^x, or perform unto him any acceptable service^y.

I grant, that we must repent. But repentance will neither atone for past sin, nor stand in the place of future obedience: and even repentance itself must be given us by the Lord Jesus Christ, “who is exalted to the right hand of God, to give repentance, no less than remission of sins^z.” I grant, also, that when we have believed in Christ, we must walk in his ways, and yield obedience to his commandments. But this obedience cannot supersede the necessity of faith: on the contrary, it can exist only as the fruit

^t 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^u Gal. ii. 20.

^x John i. 12.

^y Heb. xi. 6.

^z Acts v. 31.

of faith : and, instead of purchasing salvation for us, it is itself a part of that very salvation which the Lord Jesus Christ purchased for us upon the cross.

Now these truths have been greatly controverted, in every age of the Church. Persons have raised subtle questions upon every part of this subject, and made them the occasions of acrimonious dispute : whereas there is nothing under heaven more plain and simple than the way of salvation as prescribed for us in the Gospel. I think we may, by one single word, throw such light upon it, as shall supersede, I had almost said, all controversy respecting it. I do not mean to say, that persons who love controversy may not yet find, or make, abundant occasion for it : but I do say, that, by one single word, the whole of salvation may be so plainly declared, that a humble and contrite soul shall be enabled, for all practical purposes, to view it in all its length and breadth. What, then, is that word which will thus exhibit the Gospel in so bright and clear a light ? It is the word, REMEDY. Let us come back to the state of fallen man : he is in a guilty, polluted, helpless condition. In this state God provides for him a remedy, and both inclines and enables him to apply that remedy. For his guilt he applies to himself the atoning blood of Christ : for his pollution and weakness, he looks to the Holy Spirit to begin and carry on a work of grace within him. By looking to Christ, he obtains peace with God and in his own conscience : and, by yielding himself to the influences of God's Holy Spirit, he becomes renewed and sanctified in all his powers. His renovated health begins immediately to appear. He is enabled to mortify all his former corruptions ; and to "walk holily, justly, and unblameably," before God and man. Gradually, he becomes transformed into the Divine image, in righteousness and true holiness. Ask him now, To what he ascribes the change that has taken place within him ? and he will tell you, ' It is owing to the remedy which God has prescribed, and enabled him to apply.' To his latest hour he continues applying the same

remedy (for, whilst here, he is only in a convalescent state, and not perfectly recovered): and when taken hence to his heavenly inheritance, he ascribes all the glory to his Almighty Physician; saying, "To Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and our Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen^a." Now, what is there in all this to dispute about? What is there that is not perfectly plain and simple? What is there that a humble and contrite sinner needs beyond this, for the peace of his mind, or the sanctification and salvation of his soul? Here all appears to be of grace: both the Saviour himself, and salvation through him, are the entire unmerited gift of God. The whole of the Christian's life, too, is here perfectly plain and simple: he is continually availing himself of the remedy prescribed, and experiencing its beneficial effects. If any one apply to him for information and instruction in relation to the soul, he directs him with confidence to this remedy; and attests with thankfulness, from his own experience, its divine efficacy. He even appeals to its effects, as evidences of its divine origin. He not only acknowledges, but is himself forward to assert, that all pretensions to divine communications must be tried by this test. He would say, 'Examine the remedy by this criterion: does it operate to bring man to his primeval state in Paradise; so that, in proportion as it becomes effectual, it subdues his evil propensities, regulates his tempers and dispositions, enables him to sit loose to the things of this world, and makes him to find all his happiness in God alone? Compare him, he would say, with the Saviour in whom he professes to believe, and see whether his faith produce in him somewhat of "the mind that was in Christ^b," and constrain him to "walk as Christ walked^c." Compare him, also, with the Apostles and the primitive Christians, and see whether the

^a Rev. i. 5, 6.^b Phil. ii. 5.^c 1 John ii. 6.

remedy operate on him as it did on them. Then we may hope, indeed, that his heart is right before God ; and that the remedy which he applies for the benefit of his own soul is that which will prove effectual for the whole world.

You will perceive that I have cautiously abstained from any thing which might anticipate my future statements. It is my wish to keep every part as distinct as possible, that the subject may successively grow upon us, till it appear in all its incomprehensible majesty and grandeur. I know indeed, how unequal I am to the task of bringing it properly before you : but this I do hope, in some measure, to attain ; namely, to give clear views of all which I state, and to exhibit the subject in as simple a manner as a due investigation of it will admit of. Not that it will be possible for us to divest the subject of all difficulties. For instance, the remedy of which we have spoken is represented as altogether “ the gift of God,” no less in the application of it to the soul, than in the revelation of it to the mind : and yet men are called upon to apply it to themselves, as much as if they were originally and of themselves perfectly competent to that task. It may be said, If we can attain it of ourselves, why represent it as a gift ? and if we cannot attain it of ourselves, why represent that attainment as a duty ? I answer, To simplify our statements so as to remove all difficulties, is impossible ; because the Gospel is, “ a mystery, hid in God from the beginning of the world^d :” but, to state it in so plain and simple a way as shall approve itself to every candid mind, is an object which should be aimed at, and may certainly be attained. That which introduces such obscurity into the Gospel is, the attempt of men to reduce Christianity to a system, such as man himself would devise, or such as his unenlightened reason would approve. But “ God’s thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor are his ways as our ways^e.” No ; they infinitely transcend ours : and the true

^d Eph. iii. 9.

^e Isai. lv. 8, 9.

way to comprehend God's system is, to consider *for what ends he has revealed his Gospel*. We have said, His Gospel is a remedy : and it is a remedy, suited *in itself* to the *necessities* of man ; and suited, in the *manner of its proposal*, to the *powers* of man. Now man, however fallen, has faculties and powers, agreeably to which God will deal with him : for God draws us, not as beasts, or as stocks and stones, but “ with the cords of a man^f ;” that is, in a way consistently with our intellectual and moral powers. Now man has within him certain principles, as *hope* and *fear* ; and by these principles God will move him. But, if there were in the Scriptures nothing but promises, what scope would there be for *fear* ? or if there were nothing but commands and threatenings, what ground would there be for *hope* ? But the Scriptures, meeting both of these principles with appropriate declarations, call forth both of them into act and exercise ; and thus, as two forces from different angles, striking simultaneously and with equal strength on a given object, will propel that object forward in a straight line, so do these different declarations operate on the mind of man, and urge him forward in the path of duty and of holiness. As for those who would wrest the Scriptures to make them all speak one language, they, whether Calvinists or Arminians, shew that they have not duly considered the true design of God in the revelation of his will. They need to be reminded of this great peculiarity in the sacred records, that they are altogether suited, no less to the *powers*, than to the *necessities*, of man ; and if the different parties would agree to meet upon that ground, there would be an end of all their controversies and animosities. Only strive to simplify the Scriptures, and they will be simple : but strive to perplex and confound them, and they may soon be made a theatre for endless disputes.

To keep out of view every thing that is of a questionable nature, has been, and shall be, my earnest

^f Hos. xi. 4.

endeavour. It is the practical effect of the Gospel which I am alone anxious to promote: and now, therefore, in conclusion, I take the liberty to recommend two things: first, That we all seek a deep acquaintance with our state before God: and next, That we apply to ourselves the remedy which God has set before us in the Gospel.

Would we but comply with the former of these requests, what might we not hope for from the remedy which has been set before us? Had we but a due preparation of heart for the reception of the Gospel, surely it should “distil as the dew upon our souls, and come as rain upon the new-mown grass.” The sound of salvation purchased by our incarnate God! verily, it would transport our souls, as once the angels in heaven were transported, when they sang, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace; good-will towards men^s.” And what ineffable joy would spring up within us, from the thought of an indwelling Deity undertaking our cause, and working effectually upon our souls! Methinks we should already seize upon heaven as our own, and, with confident exultation, defy all the powers, whether of earth or hell, to rob us of it. Especially, if we began in earnest to realize these truths, then would our peace flow down like a river, and “our souls become as a well-watered garden, and as springs of water whose waters fail not.” But let us remember what is indispensably necessary to our profiting by the Gospel: we must feel, and deeply mourn over, our lost estate. “The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick:” and the remedy can be of no use to us, if we be not sensible of our disease. I pray God that this may not be forgotten by us. A mere speculative knowledge of the Gospel, however accurate, will avail us nothing. We must all be as patients in an hospital, and receive with thankfulness the remedy prescribed. If we neglect it, or attempt to substitute any other in its stead, we shall do so to

our eternal ruin. We must look to Christ for the justification, and to the Holy Spirit for the sanctification, of our souls. "There is salvation for us in no other way whatever. There is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ." But "through Him, all that believe shall be justified from all things^b." Let us, then, implore of God now to "give testimony to the word of his grace;" and so to "shine into our hearts, as to give to every one amongst us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christⁱ."

^b Acts xiii. 39.

ⁱ 2 Cor. iv. 6.

MMCCXXIII.

RICHNESS AND FULNESS OF THE GOSPEL.

1 Tim. i. 11. *The glorious Gospel of the blessed God.*

Eph. iii. 8. *Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.*

OF the nature and office of the Gospel, I have spoken in my former discourse. Of its riches and fulness, I am now to treat. But "who is sufficient" for such an undertaking^a? The "riches of Christ," as revealed in the Gospel, are declared to be "unsearchable:" how, then, can we hope to bring them forth in any measure suited to the occasion? Yet we must make the attempt; because, to bring them forth, and exhibit them to view, is the duty of all who would approve themselves faithful in the ministerial office. This was the work assigned to the Apostle Paul: and it is no less required of us at this day, if we have been called to minister in holy things, and to serve God in his sanctuary. Yet, methinks, instead of calling this a duty, I would rather call it a privilege; not a work imposed, but rather, as my text expresses it, "a grace given:" for no higher honour can be conferred on mortal man than to be sent forth by God to minister unto his fellow-sinners

^a 2 Cor. ii. 16.

“the glorious Gospel of the blessed God.” Let it not, however, be thought that this high commission has any tendency to generate pride in the hearts of those who have received it: on the contrary, it will operate rather to humble and abase the soul under a sense of its own unworthiness and insufficiency. Thus it wrought on the Apostle Paul; who, finding no word whereby to express his unworthiness of such an honour, formed a word for the purpose, and called himself, not the least of all saints, but “*less than the least*.” “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” In like manner, I would now, under a becoming sense of my own utter insufficiency, proceed with the work assigned me; and endeavour, as God shall enable me, to set before you the riches and the fulness of the Gospel of Christ.

For this end, I would consider the Gospel in a threefold view:—as an expedient devised;—as an instrument employed;—and as a gift bestowed. And I would, under each head, set forth the riches of it:—

The riches of *wisdom* contained in it as an *expedient*;

The riches of *power*, as an *instrument*; and

The riches of *grace*, as a *gift*.

First, then, I will endeavour to set forth the riches of *wisdom* contained in the Gospel, as an *expedient* for the salvation of ruined man.

The Gospel is called “the wisdom of God in a mystery^b” and, truly, the wisdom exhibited in it is deeply mysterious. Suppose, for a moment, it had been left to man to devise a way for his own restoration to the Divine favour; or that all the angels in heaven had been consulted by him for that end: I conceive that no way but that of an absolute pardon by a sovereign act of mercy could have entered into

^b 1 Cor. ii. 7.

the mind of any finite intelligence. Whether such an exercise of mercy could have consisted with God's honour, it is not for us to determine. None but God can know what is within the power of God to do. But we may safely declare, that, even supposing such an exercise of mercy, under the existing circumstances, *possible*, it was not the way which was *most* suited to the occasion, nor the way that would bring the *most* honour to God: and therefore it was not the way which a God of infinite wisdom thought fit to adopt. God, at all events, determined to make the fall of man an occasion of displaying his own glorious perfections: and, therefore, the question to be resolved was, How the removal of man's guilt, and the restoration of a ruined world to the favour of God, should be made to subserve that end?—in a word, How God should be glorified, and the sinner saved?

The *holiness* of God was called, to express its abhorrence of sin. The *justice* of God was called, to execute vengeance on those who had committed sin. The *truth* of God was called, to fulfil the threatenings denounced against sin. But how shall holiness be displayed, justice be honoured, and truth be kept inviolate, if the offender receive a full, gratuitous remission of his guilt? Here are difficulties, which not all the wisdom of men or angels could surmount. No means had been devised for the restoration of the fallen angels; nor was it within the reach of any finite intelligence to declare, how any remedy could be found for fallen man. Suppose that the idea of a substitute had entered into the mind of any, how could an innocent creature be punished in the place of the guilty? How could it be conceived, that God should ever consent to accept such a vicarious offering? and how could it be imagined, that he should ever be induced to inflict, with his own hand, on one that was innocent, the wrath due to the guilty, and to punish the innocent for the guilty?

But, suppose such a thought suggested, where was there to be found one capable of representing the

whole world, and of sustaining the punishment due to all the millions of mankind? Was there an angel that could take upon him this office? Were all the angels in heaven capable of rendering such a service to mankind? Could any one less than God himself undertake so great a work? And could it be conceived possible that *God should* exercise such love towards those who had trampled on his laws, and risen up in rebellion against him? But, supposing that God was willing to undertake the office of restoring man, how shall he do it? How shall God endure sufferings for man? How shall he put himself in the place of man? How shall any thing that he can do be made available for man, so as to be put to man's account, as if *he* had done it? And, supposing that God were to become a man, for the purpose of putting himself in the place of man, and doing and suffering what man was bound to do and suffer, how could it consist with the holiness and justice and truth of God, to let the innocent suffer and the guilty go free; yea, to let the innocent suffer on purpose that the guilty might go free?

The more we enter into the consideration of these things, and contemplate the difficulties which lay in the way of man's recovery to God, the more we shall see how impossible it was that any created wisdom should devise a way for effecting it, in consistency with God's honour. But here Divine wisdom interposed; and in the councils of the Eternal Three it was determined, that God's co-equal, co-eternal Son should "undertake for us;" that "a body should be given him;" that, in the fulness of time, he should be born into the world, and, as the Substitute and Surety of all mankind, should bear their sins in his own sacred body; and, by his own obedience unto death, should work out a righteousness for all who should believe in him, even a righteousness commensurate with the fullest demands of God's law; that so, Divine justice being satisfied, "God might be just, and yet the justifier" of our sinful race^c.

^c Rom. iii. 26.

Contemplate now this mystery. A Mediator! that Mediator, God!—that God, man!—that Deity incarnate, suffering!—those sufferings, vicarious!—his whole obedience, too, accepted as vicarious, and imputed to sinful man!—man, so rescued, brought into a state of peace with God!—man, so rescued, restored to the Divine image, approved of his God, justified before the whole assembled universe, and exalted to a throne of glory! and all in perfect consistency with the honour of God himself; yea, and all the Divine perfections glorified in this very way!—What shall we say? We are amazed: we are confounded: we can scarcely believe our own statement: it must surely be “a cunningly-devised fable.” But no: it is God’s plan for the salvation of a ruined world; and, in the contemplation of it, we can do nothing but exclaim with the Apostle, “O the depth of the *riches* both of the *wisdom* and knowledge of God! How *unsearchable* are his judgments, and his ways past finding out^d!”

Now this Gospel is, as I am to shew in the next place, the great *instrument* which God is pleased to employ for the restoration of the world to him: and the riches of his *power* as so exerted, and as effecting the complete deliverance of man from his fallen state, is now, in the Second place, to be set before you.

It will be remembered, that whilst, in the eyes of the self-righteous Jews, the Gospel was a stumbling-block, and amongst the conceited Greeks was accounted foolishness, the Apostle declared it to be “the wisdom of God, and the *power* of God^e.” It seemed, to those who confided in their own wisdom, inconceivable that the salvation of man should ever be effected by means which they judged so unsuited to the end. But the Apostle hesitated not to affirm, that the Gospel would surely answer all the ends for which it had been ordained; would prove alike

^d Rom. xi. 33.

^e 1 Cor. i. 24.

powerful *for* us, through the work of Christ; and *in* us, through the operation of his Spirit on our souls.

Behold its power *for* us! Satan had ruined our first parents, and, with them, their descendants also throughout the whole world; over whom he had usurped and exercised the most despotic sway. Hence he is called “the god of this world,” and “the prince of the power of the air; the spirit that worketh in all the children of disobedience^f.” But the Lord Jesus Christ undertook to rescue us from his dominion, and to establish his own empire over every child of man. And how would he effect this? Would it be in the way of mighty conquerors, who subdue the world by force? No; but by giving himself up into the power of his enemies, and suffering them to put him to death upon the cross. Yes, strange as this way of conquering was, “by death he overcame him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and delivered them who, through fear of death, were all their life-time subject to bondage^g.” When he hanged upon the cross as an expiring malefactor, and was himself to all appearance subdued, it was even then that “he spoiled all the principalities and powers of hell, and made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in his cross^h.” And this one record, ‘That he died for sinners upon the cross,’ is the *instrument* which, from that very moment, has been effectual for the demolition of Satan’s empire, and for the establishment of Christ’s kingdom throughout the world. This one record has been a weapon which neither men nor devils have been able to withstand: it has been “mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strong-holds, and bringing the very thoughts of men into captivity to the obedience of Christⁱ.” See the effect of it throughout all the Roman empire: how did all the gods of the heathen fall before it; and all the prejudices and passions of mankind yield to its sway! Yes, foolish as it seemed, and weak, “the foolishness of God was wiser than

^f 2 Cor. iv. 4. and Eph. ii. 2.

^h Col. ii. 15.

^g Heb. ii. 14, 15.

ⁱ 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

men, and the weakness of God was stronger than men^k: and “this stone, cut out without hands, shall break in pieces all the powers of the universe” that shall attempt to withstand it^l.

And as the Gospel is thus powerful *for* us through Christ, so shall it also be powerful *in* us, through the influences of the Holy Spirit. Look at every soul of man: that wicked adversary, the devil, “takes us all in his snare, and leads us captive at his will^m.” And how are any delivered from his chains? Is it by human eloquence, or by the powers of moral suasion? No: in no instance have they been ever able to prevail. Nothing but the Gospel has ever truly emancipated one single soul, or brought one to the enjoyment of solid peace. But *this* has been “quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of joints and marrow, and been a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heartⁿ.” See, on the day of Pentecost, what a change it wrought on thousands of the most blood-thirsty murderers! See, in instances without number, how it “turned men from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God^o!” Multitudes there are, at this day, that are living witnesses of its power; multitudes, who, by its enlightening, comforting, and sanctifying efficacy, are created altogether anew, and “filled with joy and peace in believing.” These effects the world beholds, and wonders at, and is unable to account for: but they are seen in every place where the Gospel is faithfully administered: yes, the simple exhibition of Christ crucified is still, as truly and as effectually as ever, “a hammer to break the rock in pieces^p;” and a mould, to form into Christ’s likeness all that are “delivered into it^q,” even all that are subjected to its divine influence. If it be asked, how all this comes to pass: I answer, that the Holy Spirit of God, the Third Person of the ever-blessed Trinity,

^k 1 Cor. i. 25.

^l Dan. ii. 34, 35.

^m 2 Tim. ii. 26.

ⁿ Heb. iv. 12.

^o Acts xxvi. 18.

^p Jer. xxiii. 29.

^q Rom. vi. 17. the Greek.

has undertaken to “glorify Christ,” and to render his word effectual for all the ends and purposes for which it has been proclaimed; and the miracle wrought by Peter on the man lame from his birth is still realized, in a spiritual way, from day to day: “for the name of Jesus, through faith in his name, does still make many whole; so that, whereas they were from their very birth both lame and impotent, they now walk and leap for joy in the temple,” and in the service of their God. And how great the power is that thus restores them to God may be seen in the comparison by which St. Paul sets it forth, when he prays for the Ephesian Church, and *that* in terms which no translation can ever adequately express, that they “may know what is the exceeding greatness of God’s power towards them that believe, according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead.” I say, then, that we may here behold the *riches* of *power* exerted by this apparently weak *instrument* in converting men to the faith of Christ; and that it is at this hour, no less than in the apostolic age, “the power of God unto salvation to all them that believe^r.”

But, agreeably to the plan proposed, I must go on further, in the Third and last place, to shew the *riches* of *grace* which are displayed in the Gospel, as *God’s gift* to sinful man.

St. Paul, you will remember, states, that in the whole work of salvation, as revealed in the Gospel, God especially designed, “that in the ages to come he might shew the *exceeding riches of his grace* in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus^s.” We seem called upon, therefore, to enter somewhat more fully into this part of our subject; and the rather, because it falls more within the reach of our comprehension, and seems capable of more easy development. I think, too, that the impression which this part of our subject is calculated to make will be

^r Rom. i. 16.^s Eph. ii. 7.

of a deeper and more abiding character; not only because it is of a less abstract nature, but because it applies itself more to the best feelings of our hearts.

But, whilst I enter on this part of my subject, I feel that, from the mode in which I propose to illustrate it, I may, to those who are not conversant with the Scripture history, be thought to treat it with less reverence than so deep and mysterious a subject demands. But I beg leave to say, that no man under heaven would more revolt from any thing that was irreverent in the ministration of the Gospel, than he who is about to submit to you the statement which is now contemplated. It must be remembered, that the *condescension* of the Deity is that which is particularly to be set before you; and that, if it be brought before you in a way that is not usual, it is exhibited in the very light which the Scriptures themselves most fully authorize. I need not remind this audience of the condescension of God to Abraham, when he permitted him to intercede for Sodom; and to reiterate his requests with continually increasing enlargement, till he had reduced the number of those for whose sake he desired the devoted cities to be spared, from fifty to forty-five, from forty-five to forty, from forty to thirty, from thirty to twenty, and from twenty to ten^t. Nor need I remind you of God's condescension to David, in reference to the judgments to be inflicted on him for numbering the people, in that he left altogether to the decision of the offender himself the judgment with which he should be visited^u. But there is yet another instance of condescension which comes more fully to our point, and that is, God's own permission to Solomon to ask for himself whatsoever he chose ("Ask what I shall give thee"): and his high approbation of the petition offered, in that he not only granted the thing desired, but added also other valuable blessings which the petitioner had forborne to ask^x.

Now, if we take these Scripture examples, and

^t Gen. xviii. 23—32.

^u 2 Sam. xxiv. 12.

^x 1 Kings iii. 5, 12, 13.

consider Adam after the fall as summoned into the presence of his Maker, and as having the same liberty accorded to him as had been vouchsafed to these favoured servants of the Deity; if we suppose the Almighty saying to him, in like manner as to Solomon, "Ask what I shall give thee," in order to the restoration of thyself and all thy descendants to my favour; and then as permitting him to offer successive requests in the form of a dialogue with the Deity, after the manner of Abraham; we shall behold the grace of God in a most astonishing point of view; and, I may add, in a point of view which will fill all our souls with gratitude and praise. But I must again entreat that my statement may not be misconstrued, as bearing the least appearance of irreverence: for I again say, that I would on no account whatever utter a single expression that should be justly open to such a reproach. But, indeed, my statement *shall* not be mis-apprehended, if only you will bear in mind what we ourselves, under the New-Testament dispensation, are authorized to *do* in our approaches to God, and to *expect* at his gracious hands. Our blessed Lord has expressly said to us, "Ye shall *ask what ye will*, and it shall be done unto you^y." And St. Paul, to encourage our boldness and confidence in prayer, assures us, that "God is able, and doubtless willing too, to do exceeding abundantly for us, above all that we can ask or think^z:" so that, in fact, God says to us, "Ask of me all that your necessities require; and when language fails you, stretch your imagination to the uttermost, in order to comprehend all that can, by any possibility, be desirable for you; and I will do it; I will do it *all*; I will do *above* all; I will do *abundantly* above all; I will do *exceeding abundantly* above all, even above all that you can ask or even think:" "open your mouth ever so wide, I will fill it^a."

Now with this cautious and laboured endeavour to bespeak your candid reception of my statement, I

^y John xv. 7.^z Eph. iii. 20.^a Ps. lxxxix. 10.

will proceed to suppose Adam, after he had fallen, standing in the presence of his Maker, and addressed by his Maker to the following effect: ‘Thou hast fallen; and all thy descendants, whose head and representative thou hast been, are fallen in thee. But I have designs of love and mercy towards both thee and them. I have already declared to thine adversary the devil, that one shall spring from thee to bruise his head^b: and now I say to thee, that I will not only send thee a Saviour, but I will give thee salvation in any way that thou thyself shalt desire, provided only it be not derogatory to my honour, or inconsistent with my perfections. Now, therefore consider thy necessities, and I will supply them all; so that nothing shall be wanting, either to thyself or thy posterity, that can conduce to their happiness in time or in eternity. I tell thee again, that I will grant thee a Saviour; and in him shall be combined every thing that thou thyself shalt desire.’

To this we may suppose Adam to reply: ‘O my God, I am filled with wonder at thy condescension and grace, to one who deserves nothing at thy hands but wrath and indignation: and I would rather refer it back again to thee, to give me such a Saviour as thou shalt see fit: for, indeed, “I know neither what to ask, nor how to ask it.” I feel that I am so deeply fallen, that not the highest archangel about thy throne could save me.’

‘True,’ we may suppose Jehovah to say; ‘no creature could be sufficient for that end. But “the person whom I will appoint to that office shall be my only-begotten Son^d,” “my Fellow^e,” who is altogether One with me^f; in glory equal, in majesty co-eternal.’

‘But, O my God, how shall I dare to approach him, or to spread my wants before him? I should fear, he would spurn me from his footstool, and never condescend to look on so vile and worthless a being as I am.’

^b Gen. iii. 15.

^e Rom. viii. 26.

^d John iii. 16.

^c Zech. xiii. 7.

^f John x. 30.

‘No; in order that he may sympathize with thee, he shall assume thy nature^g; and from his own experience of temptation, be prepared and qualified to succour thee in thy temptations^h. “I will prepare him a body” for this very endⁱ: and, that he may not inherit any taint from thee, I will form him in the womb of a pure Virgin; so that in his human, no less than in his divine nature, he may be the Son of God^k.’

‘But how shall I know his love towards me?’

‘Thou shalt have evidence of it, beyond all conception. For, notwithstanding “he has from all eternity been in my bosom^l,” “a partaker with me in all my glory^m,” he shall “empty himself of it all,” in order that he may accomplish the work entrusted to himⁿ. Nor shall he only *do* this great thing, but he shall *suffer* for thee all that thou hast deserved to suffer, “bearing thy sins in his own sacred body^o,” and expiating thy guilt by his own obedience unto death^p. Yes, “his visage shall be so marred more than any man’s, and his form more than the sons of men^q,” that “by his chastisement thy peace may be effected,” and “by his stripes thou mayest be healed^r.”’

‘I marvel, O my God, at this stupendous grace. But how shall I get access to him, to spread my wants before him?’

‘He shall be ever with thee, and with every one of thy believing posterity, even to the end of the world^s; so that, wherever thou art, and under whatever circumstances, thou mayest have the most endearing “fellowship with him^t,” and pour thine every request into his gracious ear^u.’

‘But how can I hope that his merciful interposition shall so prevail, as to procure for me an everlasting acceptance with *thee*?’

^g Heb. ii. 14.

^k Luke i. 34, 35.

ⁿ Phil. ii. 6, 7.

^q Isai. lii. 14.

^t 1 John i. 3.

^h Heb. ii. 18.

^l John i. 18.

^o 1 Pet. ii. 24.

^r Isai. liii. 4, 5.

^u Phil. iv. 6.

ⁱ Heb. x. 5.

^m John xvii. 5.

^p Phil. ii. 8.

^s Matt. xxviii. 20.

‘He shall make an atonement for thy sins, and work out a righteousness for thee and for all thy believing posterity^x. He shall also, by the influence of my Holy Spirit, whom he will impart unto thee, restore thee to mine image, which thou hast lost^y: and he shall be ever at my right hand, to plead his own merits in thy behalf, and, by his effectual intercession, to prevent any expression of my displeasure on account of thy short-comings and defects^z.’

‘But, O my God, thou knowest what a subtle adversary I have, even that cruel enemy that has reduced me to my present calamitous condition. And, if he prevailed against me when I was yet in innocence, how shall I be able to withstand him now that I am so weak, and encompassed, as I shall be, with such incessant and powerful temptations?’

‘This I will do for thee: “I will set Him upon my throne, even upon my holy hill of Zion^a.” and I will especially constitute him “Head over all things to the Church^b,” and “He shall reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet^c,” so that, if only thou trust in Him, thou mayest be assured, that “not all the powers of darkness shall ever be able to separate thee from his love^d.”’

‘May I then venture to hope, that, whilst ordering the affairs of the whole universe, he will condescend to notice such a worm as me?’

‘Yes; he shall have such an interest in thee, as a monarch would have in his jewels^e and in his crown^f; of which he would never, if by any means he could prevent it, suffer himself to be despoiled.’

‘But, O my God, what shall I do when I am called to thy bar of judgment? Oh! what hope can I entertain of acceptance with thee in that awful hour?’

‘The fixing of thy doom shall depend on Him^g. He, in whose atoning sacrifice thou hast trusted for

^x Rom. iii. 25. and v. 18.

^y Acts ii. 38, 39.

^z Heb. vii. 25.

^a Ps. ii. 6.

^b Eph. i. 22.

^c 1 Cor. xv. 25.

^d Rom. viii. 38, 39.

^e Mal. iii. 17.

^f Isai. lxii. 3.

^g John v. 22. Rom. xiv. 10.

the remission of thy sins, and by whose effectual grace thou hast been sustained even to the end; He, whose interests are bound up in thine, and who is to possess thee as the reward of all his travail; even He, I say, who witnessed all thy tears, thy struggles, thy services, thy pleas; He, who has been thy Saviour, shall then, in the capacity of a Judge, complete his work, and assign to thee the kingdom of heaven as thine inheritance: so that, instead of trembling at the prospect of the judgment-day, "thou mayest have confidence before him at his coming^h."

'Let there now be an end of all thy fears, and hear what I have decreed to do for thee, FOR THE MAGNIFYING OF MY OWN GRACE AND MERCYⁱ.

'Wouldst thou that I should "lay help for thee on One that is mighty^k? *Thy Saviour shall be "the Mighty God^l,"* even "God over all, blessed for evermore^m."

'Wouldst thou that, notwithstanding his greatness, thou mayest be able to approach him with humble confidence? *He shall partake of thy very nature,* and be a man even as thou artⁿ, "bone of thy bone, and flesh of thy flesh^o;" so that, whilst, by reason of his Deity, he is one with me, he shall, by reason of his humanity, be one with thee also. He shall be "God manifest in human flesh^p;" and "the very name whereby thou shalt be privileged to call him shall be, Emmanuel; which, being interpreted, is God with us^q."

'Dost thou desire some assurance of his love? *Thou shalt have such evidence of it* as shall remove from thee even a possibility of doubt: for, *for thee he shall give up* all the glory and felicity of heaven^r; *for thee sustain*, for a season, what shall be equivalent to all the horrors and miseries of hell^s; and *for thee work out a righteousness*, wherein thou shalt stand before me without spot or blemish^t; and by his

^h 1 John ii. 28.

^l Isai. ix. 6.

^o Eph. v. 30.

^r John vi. 38.

ⁱ Eph. ii. 7.

^m Rom. ix. 5.

^p 1 Tim. iii. 16.

^s Gal. iii. 13.

^k Ps. lxxxix. 19.

ⁿ Rom. viii. 3.

^q Matt. i. 23.

^t Phil. iii. 9.

effectual grace he shall “transform thee into mine image, in righteousness and true holiness^u.”

‘Dost thou desire that, as thy Mediator, he may be *ever present with thee*, to learn thy wants; and at the same time be *ever present with me*, to obtain for thee a supply of them? This also shall be done. He shall ever dwell, by his Spirit, in thy very bosom^x; and shall ever be at my right hand in heaven, as thine Advocate and Intercessor^y.

‘If thou hast any fears respecting his sufficiency to help thee, know this, that for thy sake I will commit *the government of the whole universe into his hands*^z; so that nothing shall be done, “not even an hair of thine head shall fall” to the ground, without his special permission^a.

‘Nay more; for thy satisfaction and security, there shall be *a perfect identity of interests between him and thee*; so that “whoso toucheth thee, shall touch the apple of his eye^b,” and “whoso shall give but a cup of cold water to thee, shall be considered as having given it directly and personally to him^c.”

‘And, that there may not remain a wish of thine heart unaccomplished, I have ordained that *this Saviour shall be thy Judge*. Yes, He who has “lived in thee^d,” and “been thy very life^e,” shall bear testimony to thee before the assembled universe, that thou art his redeemed child^f; and shall claim thee, as “his treasure^g,” “his inheritance^h,” “his purchased possessionⁱ.”

Of course, this supposed conference between Jehovah and his fallen creature, Adam, will not be taken by you in a strict sense, but only as a mere illustration of the condescension and grace of God. And, if it be remembered how Moses pleaded, and even expostulated, with God^k; and how “Jacob wrestled with Jehovah the whole night in prayer,

^u Eph. iv. 23, 24.

^z 1 Pet. iii. 22.

^c Matt. xxv. 40.

^f Matt. x. 32.

ⁱ Eph. i. 14.

^x Eph. iii. 17.

^a Luke xii. 6, 7.

^d Gal. ii. 20.

^g Exod. xix. 5.

^k Exod. xxxii. 11—14.

^y 1 John ii. 1, 2.

^b Zech. ii. 8.

^e Col. iii. 4.

^h Deut. xxxii. 9.

saying, I will not let thee go except thou bless me," and yet, instead of being reprov'd as guilty of presumption, was commended for his perseverance, and was honoured with the name of Israel in remembrance of it¹; and, above all, if it be borne in mind that not one word has been put into Jehovah's mouth which has not actually proceeded from his lips, this fictitious statement, or ideal conference, will not be thought more than what the whole Scripture justifies; and that, in fact, it places in the clearest light what I so earnestly wish to impress upon your minds; namely, the infinite extent of God's grace, which so far transcends all that it was possible for any created intelligence to "ask, or even think."

But, dismissing from our minds the *illustration*, what must we think of the *point illustrated*? What must we think of *the grace of God displayed in this dispensation*, when there is not any one thing which the whole universe assembled in council, could ask, provided it were really good for them, and consistent with God's honour to bestow, which is not actually vouchsafed to them, unsolicited and unsought, in the Gospel of Christ? Even things the most remote from human apprehension, and which we should have been ready to imagine incapable of being combined in the same person, are actually made to meet in the Saviour, whom God has raised up for us. Methinks, even the slightest knowledge of this incomprehensible mystery is sufficient to fill all our souls with wonder and admiration, with gratitude and praise.

Having already trespassed upon your time too long, I must wave much which the occasion calls for; and content myself with suggesting, in conclusion, that if it be a minister's duty, as doubtless it is, to "preach the riches of Christ," and to dig deeply into the mine of Scripture in order that he may be able to bring them forth; and if these riches be absolutely "unsearchable; then ought we all to seek after them with our whole hearts, and to account all other

¹ Gen. xxxii. 24—28.

acquisitions but “as dung and dross, in comparison of them.” This was, beyond all doubt, the judgment of the Apostle Paul, who says of all his high privileges and attainments, “What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ; yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord^m.” To this same judgment and experience I would invite all who hear me this day: for, what is there under heaven that can be compared with these riches? It is much to be lamented, that the great mass, even of those who read the Scriptures, content themselves with a very superficial view of all the wonders contained in them. But I would that the riches of redeeming love were sought out by every one of us with all diligence; and treasured up in our minds as of inestimable value. It is by these that the souls of men are enriched; and by these that they are adorned. It is by “beholding, with an unveiled face, the glory of Christ, that we are changed into his image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lordⁿ,” and it is “by comprehending the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, of his unbounded love, that we are filled with all the fulness of God^o.” I do therefore again invite you to contemplate this subject, and to explore *the riches of divine wisdom* contained in it: I would also have you experience in your souls *the riches of its power*; that, being transported with *a sense of God’s grace and love*, you may enjoy, in all its fulness, “THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL OF THE BLESSED GOD.”

^m Phil. iii. 7, 8.ⁿ 2 Cor. iii. 18.^o Eph. iii. 18, 19.

MMCCXXIV.

SUITABLENESS AND SUFFICIENCY OF THE GOSPEL.

1 Tim. i. 11. *The glorious Gospel of the blessed God.*

1 Cor. x. 3, 4. *They did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.*

ON entering upon my present course, I proposed to take a comprehensive view of the Gospel; and to set it before you in its nature and office, its riches and fulness, its suitableness and sufficiency, its excellency and glory.—The first two parts have been submitted to your consideration: the third part, the suitableness and sufficiency of the Gospel, comes now to be considered by us; and the words which I have read will afford me a very fit occasion for bringing the subject before you. They refer to the sustenance afforded to the whole Jewish nation in the wilderness; and they distinctly mark the parallel that is to be drawn between the food given to them, and that on which our souls are to live under the Gospel dispensation. To all the people of Israel there was but one bread, and one stream of water that followed them. The oldest and the youngest were alike sustained by that food; and all found it equally sufficient for them: nor could any one have desired any other food, without sinning against God, and against his own soul. Had any one refused that food, he of necessity must perish: and so it is under the Gospel dispensation. Christ is that Bread that came down from heaven; and that Rock also from whence the living water proceeds: and, if we make light of that provision, and refuse to partake of it, we die. So our blessed Lord assures us: “Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you: but whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life: for my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed^a,” that is, the provision made for sinners in my Gospel, whilst it is necessary for all, is also *suitable to all*, whatever be their states; and *sufficient for all*, whatever be their necessities.

Let us consider, then,

I. The suitableness of the Gospel.

There are three points of view in which it commends itself to us as suitable; namely, as *offering* to

^a John vi. 53—55.

us *freely*—and *communicating* to us *fully*—and *securing* to us *finally*, all the blessings which it has provided for us.

First, it *offers* them to us *freely*. It requires nothing to be done by us, in order to *merit* its blessings, or to *earn*, if I may so speak, an interest in them. They are altogether a free gift of God to man; as much as ever the manna was which was rained about the tents of Israel, or the stream which followed them through all their wanderings in the wilderness. In this light they are represented throughout the whole inspired volume. It is remarkable, that the very first promise of a Saviour was not only given without any solicitation on the part of our first parents, but it was not, strictly speaking, given to them at all; it was included in the threatening denounced by God against the serpent who beguiled them, and was not given directly either to Adam or to Eve: “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” Not only was the Lord Jesus Christ himself the gift of God to man; but every blessing which he has purchased for us comes to us also under that endearing character: as it is written, “The *wages* of sin is death; but the *gift of God* is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord^b.” Hence all the invitations of the Gospel are sent to us unclogged with any conditions: nothing is required but a desire after them, and a willingness to receive them freely at the hands of God: “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and *he that hath no money*, come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, *without money and without price*^c.” Again: “The Spirit and the bride say, Come: and let him that heareth, say, Come: let him that is athirst come: and *whosoever will*, let him come and take of the water of life *freely*^d.” Now this renders the Gospel suitable to us all: for if we were required to do something to

^b Rom. vi. 23.

^c Isai. lv. 1.

^d Rev. xxii. 17.

deserve its blessings, what could we do? or what hope could we entertain of acquiring an interest in it? Were an offer of salvation now made to the fallen angels upon such conditions, what would it avail them? They, in their present state, are incapable of doing any thing to merit God's favour in the slightest degree: and in that same state, that state of incapacity to help ourselves, are we also. But, through mercy, no such work is required at our hands. Both Moses in the law, and St. Paul in the Gospel, concur in this salutary counsel: "Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? that is, to bring Christ down from above: or, Who shall descend into the deep? that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead. But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thine heart; that is, *the word of faith* which we preach^e." Yes, we do preach, that to receive every thing by faith is the office that is assigned to every child of man: and though, *after we have embraced the Gospel*, there is much for us to do in order to honour and adorn it, our first reception of its blessings must be altogether free, and we must stand indebted for them solely to the sovereign grace of God.

But, in truth, I say too little, if I merely affirm that the Gospel offers every thing to us freely. The fact is, that St. Paul expresses the greatest jealousy upon this head; and declares, that if we attempt to do any thing, however good in itself, with a view, either in whole or in part, to merit salvation by it, we make void the whole Gospel: "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing^f." He tells us, that salvation must be "wholly of works, or wholly of grace^g." He reminds us, that if salvation were of works, in ever so small a degree, there would, in that degree, be room for boasting: whereas boasting must be wholly and for ever excluded^h; and salvation, from

^e Rom. x. 5—8.

^g Rom. xi. 6.

^f Gal. v. 2, 4.

^h Rom. iii. 27.

first to last, be received as a free gift of God for Christ's sakeⁱ.

This is not pleasing to the proud heart of man; because we are ever looking for something within ourselves, as a ground of self-preference or self-complacency. But, what if God had waited till Israel had done something to *merit* the heavenly food with which he supplied them? It was a *free gift* which they needed: and it is that which *we also need*, and which renders the Gospel altogether suitable to fallen man.

Next, the Gospel *communicates* its blessings to us *fully*. There is not a want in man which it does not supply. Are we "wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked?" "It gives us gold tried in the fire, that we may be rich; and white raiment to cover us, that the shame of our nakedness may not appear; and it anoints our eyes with eye-salve, that we may see^k." This is a feature of the Gospel which the Prophet Isaiah portrays in very lively colours: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek: he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified^l." Now, this passage peculiarly illustrates the point before us; because it takes a view of mankind in a vast diversity of conditions, and represents the Gospel as adapting itself to every different state, and as supplying the precise wants of every individual. And it is the more to be noticed, because our blessed Lord, in the first public discourse that ever he delivered, turned to that very

ⁱ Eph. ii. 8, 9.

^k Rev. iii. 17, 18.

^l Isai. lxi. 1—3.

passage, and cited it, and declared it to be that very day fulfilled in their ears^m. Now, conceive of man in every state that can be imagined; conceive of him as bowed down with a sense of guilt, or harassed with temptations of Satan, or sinking under persecutions from men, or under the hidings of God's face, or in the prospect of immediate dissolution; the Gospel contains that very thing which he needs—pardon for all sin, strength against every temptation, support under every trial, comfort under every affliction, and life by the simple exercise of faith, precisely as it was given to the dying Israelites by a view of the brazen serpentⁿ. Were there any one situation for which it did not yield a supply, or any one thing which it required us to provide from our own store, it would not be a suitable remedy for us. Suppose, for a moment, that the Israelites in the wilderness had been provided with bread and water; but that they had been left to their own guidance, or that no miracle had been wrought to preserve their clothes, or to keep their feet from the common effect of long and wearisome toil; the want of any one thing would have rendered all their other blessings vain and nugatory. And so it would be with us. Say, for instance, to a dying man, ‘You must render such and such services to the Lord, before you can be accepted by him;’ what hope would such painful tidings inspire? But tell him that “Christ died for the very chief of sinners,” and that “those who come unto him he will in no wise cast out^o,” and you will comfort his soul: and though such death-bed experiences are by no means to be trusted in, yet he may peradventure be made such another monument of grace as was the dying thief, and may be a “jewel in the Redeemer's crown” for ever and ever.

But, thanks be to God! there is nothing which the Gospel does not impart to us in the hour of need: pardon, peace, holiness, glory, all are vouchsafed to us for Christ's sake; “who of God is made unto

^m Luke iv. 18—21.ⁿ John iii. 14, 15.^o John vi. 37.

us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption^p.”

But that which renders the Gospel pre-eminently suitable to us, is, that it *finally secures* to us the full possession of its blessings. It represents salvation, with all its attendant benefits, as contained in an everlasting covenant, and made over to all who truly believe in Christ^q. It represents that covenant, also, as “confirmed by God himself with an oath, in order that, by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge, to lay hold upon the hope set before us^r.” It further represents Christ as the Mediator of that covenant^s, and all its blessings as treasured up in him for our use^t: and *therefore* treasured up in him, *because*, if they had been committed to us, they would have been insecure, or, rather, would infallibly be lost. The statements of Scripture upon this head are as strong and express as can well be conceived. The Lord Jesus Christ himself is said to live in the believer: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live: yet not I; but Christ liveth in me^u.” But stronger still is the Apostle’s language in another place: “Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory^x.” Here, not only is Christ called our life; but our life is said to be “hid with Christ in God:” and from that very circumstance we are justified in hoping, that, when he shall appear, we also shall appear with him in glory. But I apprehend that the real force of these words is not generally seen. I conceive the true import of them to be to the following effect. When God first made man, he committed the life of the whole universe to Adam, as their head and representative, that they might stand in him, or fall in him. But, notwithstanding Adam was perfect, and had but one single

^p 1 Cor. i. 30.

^q Heb. viii. 8—10.

^r Heb. vi. 17, 18.

^s Heb. ix. 15.

^t Col. i. 19.

^u Gal. ii. 20.

^x Col. iii. 3, 4.

restraint imposed upon him as a test of his fidelity, he fell; and, by his fall, brought death and destruction upon all his posterity. Now, in restoring men to his favour, God says, ‘I will not commit your eternal interests into your own hands: for if I do, weak as ye are, and surrounded with temptations, and having your own interests alone confided to you, what can I hope, but that you will cast them all away, and perish? I will therefore give you another Covenant Head and Representative, even my only dear Son, and commit all your interests to *him*: HE shall be your hope: “he shall be your very life;” yea, “your life shall be hid with Christ in God:” then I shall be sure that no enemy shall prevail against you: for “none can pluck you out of *his* hands; much less shall any pluck you out of *my* hands.”’

In what I have said on this sublime portion of Holy Writ, I would be understood to speak with diffidence. But I *believe* that the interpretation which I have put upon it is the true sense, and that no one can enter into its full meaning who does not view it in this light. But the point I am insisting on depends not on one or two particular passages: it is the statement of the whole Scriptures. Every soul is given into the hands of Christ, that he may “keep it by his own power, through faith unto salvation^z.” Hence it is that he could appeal to his Father in his last intercessory prayer, that “of those who had been committed to him he had lost none^a.” And hence it is that St. Paul was so “confident, that, wherever the good work was begun in a soul, it should be carried on and perfected unto the end^b.” He knew that Christ was the Author of true faith, wherever it existed; and that he, who was “the Author, would also be the Finisher, of it^c,” and hence he assured both himself and every believing soul, that, inasmuch as “Christ has said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee^d,” we may dismiss all

^y John x. 28, 29.

^z John xvii. 2. 1 Pet. i. 5.

^a John xvii. 12.

^b Phil. i. 6.

^c Heb. xii. 2.

^d Heb. xiii. 5, 6.

fear, and rest in perfect confidence, that “what he has promised, he is able also to perform^e.”

Now, then, see how suitable to us the Gospel is, in this point of view. It shews us where our hope is; and that, as “Christ is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy^f,” we have nothing to do, but to commit ourselves into his hands, and to “live the life which we now live in the flesh, simply by faith in the Son of God, who has loved us, and given himself for us^g.” And, if we only know and remember “in whom we have believed,” we may be assured, that “he will keep that which we have committed to him^h,” and “preserve us blameless unto his heavenly kingdomⁱ.”

If any suppose that such a confidence in Christ would supersede the necessity of holy fear and watchfulness, I beg leave, once for all, to say, that, notwithstanding all that God has treasured up for us in Christ, we are still weak in ourselves, and to our latest hour “must we work out our salvation with fear and trembling^k.” We are saved *by faith*, as far as it respects *God*; but we are saved *by fear*, as far as it respects *ourselves*: and to every soul under heaven are those words addressed; “Thou standest *by faith*: be not high-minded, but *fear*^l.”

II. The sufficiency of the Gospel comes now, in the second place, to be considered.

Truly, it is sufficient for every soul of man, even as the manna and the water were for the whole nation of Israel. For our *comfort*, for our *sanctification*, and for our complete *salvation*, it is perfectly sufficient. It is sufficient for our comfort. Suppose a man to be brought, by a view of his own sinfulness, to the very borders of despair; what can he need more, than to hear that God himself has undertaken his cause, and assumed his nature, and expiated his

^e Rom. iv. 21.

^f Jude, ver. 24.

^g Gal. ii. 20.

^h 2 Tim. i. 12.

ⁱ 2 Tim. iv. 18.

^k Phil. ii. 12.

^l Rom. xi. 20.

guilt, by his own sufferings unto death? What would he wish to add to this? What can, by any possibility, be added to it? If this be not sufficient, what can be? His sins, even though they were as numerous and heinous as those of Manasseh himself, are but finite: whereas the atonement offered for him is of value infinite; yes, and the righteousness wrought out for him is also of value infinite. We are told expressly that “the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse from all sin^m,” and that “all who believe in him shall be justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Mosesⁿ.” Let a man’s sins be of ever so deep a dye, even “though they were red as scarlet or as crimson, they shall be made white as snow^o.” We can scarcely conceive of greater guilt than that of David, after all the mercies that had been vouchsafed to him, and all the profession of piety which he had made; and yet he prays, “Purge *me* with hyssop, and *I* shall be clean; wash *me*, and *I* shall be whiter than snow^p,” and then he acknowledges the efficacy of this remedy, saying, “Thou hast made the bones which thou hast broken to rejoice^q.” The instances in the New Testament of the efficacy of the Gospel to comfort a believing soul, are numberless. Behold the three thousand on the day of Pentecost, whose hands were yet reeking with the Saviour’s blood: scarcely had they believed in Christ one hour, before they all “ate their bread with gladness and singleness of heart, blessing and praising God^r.” Wherever Christ was preached, great joy sprang up in the hearts of those who heard the word^s. And is it not so at this day? What “though we do not see Christ, yet we love him; and, believing in him, we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and glorified^t.” This is declared to be the invariable effect of the Gospel throughout the whole world: “Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth; break forth into

^m 1 John i. 7.ⁿ Acts xiii. 39.^o Isai. i. 18.^p Ps. li. 7.^q Ps. li. 8.^r Acts ii. 46, 47.^s Acts viii. 5, 8.^t 1 Pet. i. 7, 8.

singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel^u." Only let the Gospel descend as dew upon any place, and "the wilderness will be glad, and the desert will rejoice, and blossom as the rose^x:" for "the Lord will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord: joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody^y."

I forbear to speak of other sorrows, and of the consolation which the Gospel will administer under them; because there is no sorrow whatever, which, in weight or poignancy, can be compared with that which a sense of guilt creates in the soul: and, if the supports of the Gospel are so effectual under that, we may well suppose that all minor sorrows shall flee before it, even as the mists before the noon-day sun.

I would observe therefore next, that the Gospel is sufficient for our *sanctification*. Never was any thing found to change the heart of man but the Gospel. Let any one call to mind the labours of the ancient philosophers, and inquire whether any one ever prevailed so far as to sanctify the hearts, of many, shall I say? nay, of one single individual? No; never, from the foundation of the world, did philosophy effect this, in one single instance. But, when the Gospel was preached, what effects were produced in every place! The passions of men were subdued; their lusts were mortified; their habits were changed; their dispositions were made altogether new; and those who had borne in every feature a semblance of their father, the devil, were "transformed into the image of their God, in righteousness and true holiness." This was nothing but what the voice of prophecy had long before announced: "As the rain cometh down, and the snow, from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and

^u Isai. xliv. 23.^x Isai. xxxv. 1.^y Isai. li. 3.

maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. . . . Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree; and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off^z."

If it be asked, How the Gospel effects this change? I answer, It reveals a Saviour to us in all the wonders of his love; and thus generates in the soul a desire to serve and honour him. No sooner do we see that we have been "bought with a price," than we desire to "glorify God with our bodies and our spirits, which are his^a." In aid of these new desires, it brings down the Holy Spirit into the soul. That Divine Agent is promised to all who believe in Christ: and Christ does send him down into the hearts of his people, to "strengthen them with might in their inward man^b," and to "work all their works in them^c." Thus they become "sanctified in body, soul, and spirit^d," and are rendered "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light^e." Thus does the Gospel sanctify men; *filling them with new principles*, to which they were utter strangers before; and *imparting to them new powers*, which none but a believing soul can ever exercise.

I add once more, the Gospel is sufficient for our *complete salvation*. In no situation whatever can we be placed, wherein it does not afford us "strength equal to our day^f." It not only makes us conquerors, but "more than conquerors;" rendering our very troubles a source of joy^g, and our conflicts an occasion of more exalted triumphs. Behold the Apostle Paul under a trial of no ordinary kind; a trial so grievous that it seemed almost entirely to overwhelm

^z Isai. lv. 10, 11, 13.

^c Isai. xxvi. 12.

^f Deut. xxxiii. 25.

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^a 1 Cor. vi. 20.

^d 1 Thess. v. 23.

^g Rom. v. 3.

H H

^b Eph. iii. 16.

^e Col. i. 12.

him : yet, when the Lord Jesus had given an answer of peace to his soul, he was not only reconciled to his trials, but actually took pleasure in them. “ I take pleasure,” says he, “ in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake : for when I am weak, then am I strong^h.” Nay, when in expectation of martyrdom itself, he not only felt no apprehensions, but regarded his sufferings rather as an occasion of joy ; and not only congratulated himself upon his prospects, but desired his Christian friends to congratulate him alsoⁱ. But, to enter properly into this part of our subject, we should see what an inconceivable superiority to all the powers, whether of earth or hell, the Gospel imparted to that highly-favoured servant of Christ. Hear his own words, even whilst he was yet contending with all his enemies : “ If God be for us, who can be against us ? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things ? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect ? It is God that justifieth ; who is he that condemneth ? It is Christ that died ; yea, rather, that is risen again ; who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword ? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord^k.” Now here I wish it to be particularly noticed, that not one word of all this is spoken by him as an attainment peculiar to himself as an Apostle : the whole is spoken *upon principles common to the whole Christian world* : Is God for us ? did Christ die for us ? and is he risen and making intercession for us ?

^h 2 Cor. xii. 10. ⁱ Phil. ii. 17, 18. ^k Rom. viii. 31—39.

then is the whole of this experience proper for *us* also, as well as for him : and in it we see, that the Gospel is sufficient to perfect every thing that concerns us ; and so to carry us through things temporal, that we may finally attain the things eternal.

Such, then, is the spiritual food which God commends to you this day. And now let me invite you all to partake of it. In rich abundance is your heavenly Father causing the manna to fall around your tents ; and at this moment are the streams gushing out like a river, for the satisfying of your thirsty souls. O that we all felt our need of the bread and water of life, as the Israelites did of the food that perisheth ! Paint to yourselves the sense of obligation which they felt at having all their wants supplied ; and the avidity with which they seized the provisions which were thus afforded them. Would to God that we had some resemblance to them, and could feel an intensity of interest suited to the occasion, now that Christ is freely offered to us for the support of our souls ! Remember, I pray you, that not one amongst them was benefited by merely hearing or seeing what God had done for them : no, it was by applying to themselves the heavenly gift, for their own personal comfort and support. In like manner must we also apply to ourselves all the rich provisions of the Gospel : we must “ *eat* the flesh of Christ, and *drink* his blood,” if we would have our souls nourished unto eternal life. Earnestly would I wish that this distinction should be made, and carefully remembered. We are ready to think that we have done enough when we have heard the Gospel, and approved of the truths contained in it. But we must receive them into our hearts by faith ; yea, they must enter into our very souls ; and we must live upon them from day to day. Never are we to be weary of feeding upon Christ : we must see and feel that “ his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed :” and, feeding daily upon him, we must *hunger for nothing else, and thirst for nothing else*¹. At

the same time, we must take care to shew that we are really invigorated by this heavenly food, and fitted to prosecute our journey through this dreary wilderness. In a word, whilst we take it to ourselves as suitable, we must shew to others its sufficiency for all that our necessities can require. Let none despise this food. Whether we be old or young, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, Christ is alike needful for us, and will be alike sufficient for us. There is one peculiarity, however, in which the parallel fails, and must be turned into a contrast. Those who ate of that spiritual food died. But shall any one perish who feeds on Christ? No, truly: whoever he may be, he shall become a monument of saving grace, and his soul shall live for ever.

And now, need I add any thing more to shew the importance of receiving Christ, and feeding upon him? Alas! alas! the Israelites in the wilderness needed none to urge them to use the food provided for them, notwithstanding all the benefit to be derived from it was the prolongation of their bodily life, which must at all events terminate in a few years. But what exhortations and entreaties are necessary to induce us to feed on Christ, for the life of our souls! Some feel no need of Christ, others pour contempt upon him, as unsuitable: others, again, think they must add to him, as insufficient: and few, very few, will live upon him, as “all their salvation, and all their desire.” To those, however, who do see the suitableness and sufficiency of Christ, I would say, Gather up your portion of the manna daily, before the risen sun has had time to melt it; and refresh yourselves with the living waters with exquisite delight: and, in the strength of this your food, go on your way rejoicing^m. Yes, “as ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him, rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgivingⁿ.”

^m 1 Kings xix. 8.

ⁿ Col. ii. 6, 7.

MMCCXXV.

THE EXCELLENCY AND GLORY OF THE GOSPEL.

1 Tim. i. 11. *The glorious Gospel of the blessed God.*

Eph. iii. 18, 19. *Be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.*

FROM no part of Holy Writ do we obtain a deeper insight into the great mysteries of the Gospel, than from the prayers of the Apostle Paul. He there embodied, as it were, all his views of divine truth, and poured forth his soul to God in terms altogether out of the reach of an uninspired mind; in terms so vast, so grand, so comprehensive, that, with the utmost stretch of our imagination, we find it exceeding difficult to grasp the thoughts contained in them.

I will not detain you with any comment on this prayer, because the subject which I have to bring before you is of itself sufficient to occupy all the time that can reasonably be devoted to one discourse. I have omitted the former part of this prayer, because it is the latter part alone that is applicable to the subject before us, or proper to be brought forward as introductory to this discourse. But to that part I would wish to draw your more particular attention; because, in praying for the Ephesians, that they might “be able to comprehend, with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, and by comprehending it be filled with all the fulness of God,” he not only adverts to the subject which I am about to bring before you, but declares that “all saints in the universe ought in some good measure to comprehend it.” It is obvious, on the most superficial view of these words, that the Apostle saw a glory and excellency in the Gospel, beyond what it was in the power of language to express, or of any

finite imagination fully to comprehend; and that he regarded a discovery of that excellency as the appointed means of accomplishing in men the whole work of divine grace, and of ultimately filling them with all the fulness of God. Hence it will be seen how appropriate these words are to our present subject; wherein I am to set before you, as God shall enable me, the Gospel of Christ, in all its excellency and in all its glory.

In prosecution of this great object, I will endeavour to exhibit the Gospel, as *honouring God's law*; as *glorifying his perfections*; and as *laying a foundation for greater happiness, both to men and angels, than either of them could ever have enjoyed, if man had never fallen.*

First, I am to set it forth as *honouring God's law.*

This is a point of view in which it deserves the most attentive consideration. For, if we proclaim a free and full salvation, and *that* simply by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, we immediately appear to men to set aside the law. And more particularly, when we state, that the law cannot justify any man—that it is not to be observed with any view to obtain justification by it—that we must not so much as lean to it in the slightest degree—and that the placing of the smallest dependence upon it will invalidate the whole Gospel—we are supposed to be downright Antinomians in principle, whatever we may be in practice; and our doctrines are represented as quite dangerous to the community. Now, it must be remembered, that St. Paul's own statements were, in the judgment of many, obnoxious to this very reproach; and that he was, *therefore*, constrained to vindicate them from this charge: “Do we, then, make void the law through faith? God forbid,” says he: “yea, we establish the law^a.”

The law, you will remember, requires perfect obedience to all its commandments, and denounces a curse against every one who shall violate even the

^a Rom. iii. 31.

least of them in the smallest possible degree. Now, it is manifest that we have broken them in ten thousand instances, and are consequently obnoxious to its heaviest judgments: and yet we say to those who believe in Christ, that they have nothing to fear; for that “there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.” Here, then, we seem to set aside the law altogether, both in its commanding and condemning power. But the truth is, that we establish the law in both respects: for the Gospel declares, that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator of heaven and earth, was “made of a woman, made under the law,” on purpose that, in his own person, he might fulfil the law which we had broken, and endure the penalties which we had incurred; that so not a jot or tittle should pass from the law, till the whole of it, in every possible view, should be fulfilled. This work he both undertook and executed. He obeyed the law, in its utmost possible extent; and he endured the wrath due to the sins of the whole world. Now, consider how greatly the law was honoured by this. It would have been honoured, if all mankind had obeyed it: and it would also have been honoured, if they had all been consigned over to the punishment they had merited by their disobedience. In either case, its authority would have been displayed and vindicated. But when the Lawgiver himself, the Mighty God, becomes a man, and puts himself under its authority, and obeys all its precepts, and suffers all its penalties, and does this on purpose that the law may be honoured, and that the salvation of man may be rendered compatible with its demands, *this* puts an honour upon the law which it would never have obtained by any other means, and must for ever render it glorious in the eyes of the whole intelligent creation.

But it is not in the Lord Jesus Christ alone, as our Head and Representative, that the law is honoured: the Gospel engages that every sinner who is interested in its provisions shall himself also honour the law in his own person. For every one, at the

time that he comes to Christ for mercy, must acknowledge, that he is justly condemned by the law; and that, if, for his transgressions of the law, he be cast into the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, it will be no more than his just desert. And this must he acknowledge, not in mere words only, that carry not the heart along with them: no; he must feel that he is actually in danger of this very punishment; and that nothing but a most wonderful act of mercy can ever deliver him from it. He must go to God, as one that sees this very punishment awaiting him; and must, from his inmost soul, cry out with Peter, when sinking in the waves, "Save, Lord, or I perish!" Moreover, in his supplications for mercy, he must plead the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ in his behalf. He must not even desire that the authority of the law should be made void; no, not even for the salvation of his soul: he must found all his hopes on the honour done to the law by the sufferings of Christ; and must desire, that those sufferings may be put to his account, as if he himself had endured them: nor is his own mind to be satisfied with any thing which does not satisfy the law, and put honour upon the law. Nor is this all: for he must acknowledge, that without a righteousness commensurate with the utmost demands of the law, he never can be, nor ever *ought to be*, accepted of his God. He must deeply lament his utter inability to keep the law in this manner; and must renounce all hope in himself; assured, that nothing but perfect obedience can ever be received by God, or be acknowledged by him as honouring his law. A man rightly instructed would deem it an insult to the law to desire that his partial and worthless performances should be regarded as answering its demands: and, in this view, renouncing all hope in himself and his own works, he will plead the obedience which his incarnate God has paid to the law, and trust in that alone for righteousness and salvation. He will not even wish for acceptance with God on any other terms than those of having

rendered, either in himself or in his divine Surety, a perfect obedience to the law: in a word, he will regard the Lord Jesus Christ as “the end of the law for righteousness to the believing soul^b,” and trust in him altogether under that character, “The Lord our Righteousness^c.” Thus you perceive that the Gospel provides for the honour of the law, not only in shewing that it has been honoured by the obedience and sufferings of our incarnate God, but in requiring every sinner in the universe to honour it in his own person, by founding all his hopes on that very mediation by which the law has been so greatly honoured.

Nor have we yet attained a full view of this part of our subject: for the Gospel yet further requires, that all who in this way have found acceptance with God shall endeavour to honour the law by their own obedience to it in every respect. True, indeed, the believer feels that he cannot perfectly obey it: he feels too that he can never, by his best attempts to obey it, recommend himself to God, so as to obtain a justifying righteousness before him: yet he regards the law as “holy, and just, and good;” and endeavours to fulfil it, as much as if he were to be saved altogether by his obedience to it. “The grace of God, which bringeth salvation, teaches him this: it teaches him, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, he should live soberly, and righteously, and godly, in this present world^d.” Whilst, therefore, he embraces the promises of the Gospel as the one ground of his hope, he will make use of those promises as an incentive to “cleanse himself from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God^e.”

Now, this effect of the Gospel is not produced only in a few particular instances; it is universal: nor is there so much as one sinner that ever finds acceptance through Christ, without having this experience realized in his soul. If any person under heaven

^b Rom. x. 4.

^c Jer. xxiii. 6.

^d Tit. ii. 11, 12.

^e 2 Cor. vii. 1.

profess to have obtained salvation through Christ without having this humiliation under a sense of sin—this conviction of his lost estate—this acquiescence in the justice of God as consigning him over to perdition—this consciousness of his inability to repair his breaches of the law—this persuasion that the law ought to be honoured both in its commanding and condemning power—this hope in Christ, as having so honoured it in both respects—this utter renunciation of every other hope—and, in addition to it all, this desire to obey the law, and this determination to honour it in every possible way—I say, if any person without this, as the deep and abiding experience of his soul, should profess an expectation of salvation by Christ, we should not hesitate to say of him, what the Apostle said of the self-deceiving Jews, that, however he may be “seeking after righteousness, he neither has attained it,” nor ever will attain it, in the way in which he is proceeding^f: he is yet a stranger to the law, and the glory of the Gospel is yet hid from his eyes. He has yet to learn, that, as the Gospel honours the law, so every one that is saved by the Gospel does, and must, in every possible way, and to the utmost extent of his power, contribute to this good work of “magnifying and making honourable the law of God^g.”

The next point of view in which the excellency of the Gospel is to be shewn, is, that it *glorifies all the perfections* of the Deity.

That there was a difficulty in making the salvation of man to consist with the honour of the Divine perfections, was mentioned in a former discourse; wherein were shewn the *wisdom* of God in contriving a way, the *power* of God in effecting it, and the *grace* of God in accommodating it to all the wants and necessities of fallen man. My present point will lead me to shew, not merely that this consistency is secured, but that all the perfections of God are more glorified in this way than they could have been in

^f Rom. ix. 31.

^g Isai. xlii. 21.

any other. For instance, suppose that man, with all his descendants, had been consigned to misery: the justice of God would have appeared; and his truth also would have been seen: but it would not have been known that there existed in the Deity any such attribute as mercy; or that, if it did exist in him, it could ever find a fit scope for exercise: since the exercise of it must, of necessity, involve in it some remission of the rights of justice, and some encroachment on the honour of the law. On the other hand, if free and full remission of sins had been granted unto man, it would not have been seen how such an act of grace could consist with the rights of justice and holiness and truth. But, in the method of salvation which the Gospel reveals, not only are these perfections reconciled with each other, but all of them are exceedingly enhanced and glorified.

That I may keep as clear as possible of my former subject, I will now confine myself to three of the Divine attributes—justice, mercy, and truth; and shew how a tenfold lustre is reflected upon them in the Gospel salvation, beyond what could ever have beamed forth in any other way.

Justice, as I have said, would have been seen in the condemnation of the *human race*. But what shall we say of it as exhibited in the Gospel? Behold, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is “God over all,” puts himself in the place of sinful man, and undertakes to endure for man all that the sins of the whole world had merited. But what will justice say, when it finds our sins transferred to *him*? Will it venture to seize on *him*? Will it exact the debt of *him*? Will it draw forth the sword against *him*, who is “Jehovah’s Fellow^h?” Methinks the sword, stretched out, would fall from the hand of justice, and refuse to execute its appointed work. But, no: sin is found on our incarnate God. True, it is in him only by imputation: yet, being imputed to him, he must be made answerable for itⁱ, and must himself endure all

^h Zech. xiii. 7.

ⁱ Isai. liii. 7. Bishop Lowth’s Translation.

that it has merited at the hands of God. Behold, then, for the honour of God's justice, the cup is put into the hands of our blessed Lord: and the very dregs of the cup of bitterness are given him to drink: nor is he released from his sufferings, till he can say, "It is finished." Contemplate, now, this mysterious fact; the God of heaven and earth becoming man, and, by his own obedience unto death, satisfying the demands of law and justice, in order that God, through his vicarious sufferings, may "be just, and yet the justifier of them that believe in Christ^k." But could justice be satisfied with nothing less? Would it accept of nothing less? Would it not consent to the salvation of a human being on any other terms than these? Behold, then, I say, how exalted is its character! how inalienable its rights! how inexorable its demands! Truly, in all that it inflicts, either on men or angels, it is not so glorified, as it is in this stupendous mystery.

Next, let us take a view of the same subject in reference to *mercy*. This Divine attribute would doubtless have been displayed, if man, by a mere sovereign act of grace, had been pardoned. But it did not seem good to the Deity that mercy should so triumph over all his other attributes. It shall indeed be brought forth to light, and have full scope for operation; but its actings shall be such only as shall consist with the honour of every other attribute. But what way shall be devised for this? Divine wisdom, as I have before shewn, contrived a way, wherein God might be at the same time "a just God and a Saviour¹." The plan proposed was, that God's only dear Son should be substituted in the place of sinners. But shall mercy be exercised at such an expense as this? Better were it that all its gracious purposes should be abandoned, than that Almighty God should stoop to such a condescension as this. What! that mercy shall be shewn towards a number of rebellious worms—of creatures that can never

^k Rom. iii. 26.

¹ Isai. xlv. 21.

contribute any thing to the happiness or honour of their God—of creatures, millions of whom, if necessary for God's honour, could be created in an instant, in the room of those that should perish; that mercy, I say, might be shewn to these, shall the God of heaven divest himself of his glory? shall the Creator of the universe become a man? shall he have the sins of a rebellious world laid on him? shall he become a victim, and be offered upon the altar of divine justice—that man, worthless man, may be spared? Surely mercy can never require this: it will be content to lie hid in the bosom of the Deity to all eternity, rather than that such a sacrifice should be made for its honour. But no; mercy cannot be so restrained: it pants for an opportunity of pouring forth its benefits into the souls of men. Its bowels are so moved at the sight of a perishing world, that it will not, it cannot, rest. Every thing but God's honour shall give way to it: and now that *that* can be secured, no price shall be too great for its descent from heaven to bless our ruined race. Go now to Bethlehem, and see in the manger that new-born infant, your incarnate God, “God manifest in the flesh.” Who sent him thither? Who brought him from his throne of glory, into this world of sin and misery? It was mercy, struggling in the bosom of Almighty God, and prevailing for its own development in this mysterious way. Go again to Gethsemane and Calvary: behold that innocent sufferer: see him prostrate on the ground, bathed in a bloody sweat! see him hanging on the cross, agonizing under a load of his creatures' guilt, crying in the depths of dereliction, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” and expiring under the wrath of Almighty God, the wrath due to him as the Surety and Substitute of a guilty world! Who has brought him to this state? 'Twas mercy: mercy would not rest: it would break forth: rather than not exercise itself towards mankind, it would transfer to God himself the penalty due to them, and write in the blood of an incarnate God the pardon it designed for sinful man. Say, now,

whether mercy be not glorified in this astonishing mystery, which the Gospel has so fully revealed?

And *truth*, also, has derived to itself no less a measure of glory from this stupendous mystery. God had said, "In the day that thou eatest of the forbidden fruit, thou shalt surely die." When, therefore, man had eaten, what remained but that the threatened penalty should be inflicted on him? The word had gone forth: it could not be revoked: nor could its sentence be reversed, consistently with the sacred rights of truth. What then shall be done? If the sentence is *executed* on man, the veracity of God is displayed and honoured: but how can man be *spared*, and truth be kept inviolate? The suggestions of wisdom being approved, and the substitution of God's only-begotten Son in the sinner's place admitted, truth willingly accepts the proposal, gladly transfers the penalty, and joyfully inflicts on the victim the sentence due to the offender^m:—and thus is consummated that mystery which none but God could ever have devised, "*Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other*." Thus are not only the different perfections of God made to harmonize in the salvation of man; but justice is exercised in a way of mercy, and mercy is exercised in a way of justice; and both of them, in a way of holiness and truth.

But the glory and excellency of the Gospel yet further appear, in that the Gospel, as I observed in the third place, *lays a foundation for greater happiness, both to men and angels, than either of them could ever have enjoyed, if man had never fallen.*

The felicity of angels doubtless is great; as would that of men also have been, if man had never fallen. But, from the Gospel, both the one and the other derive a vast accession to their happiness, beyond all that they would otherwise ever have possessed. In reference to angels, I may say, that if in no other respect they were benefited by the Gospel, they

^m Isai. liii. 10.

ⁿ Ps. lxxxv. 10.

would derive an immense advantage from it, in that, from seeing how great a sacrifice was necessary to restore man to happiness, they must of necessity form a higher estimate of the happiness that has been freely conferred on them : and, in proportion to the sense which they feel of the obligations conferred upon them, must their love to God be augmented, and their felicity advanced.

But, independent of this consideration, I doubt not but they have received by the Gospel a vast accession to their bliss.

I think it will readily be acknowledged, that the happiness of the angelic hosts is derived chiefly, if not entirely, from beholding the glory of their God. From the first instant of their creation, they must therefore have been inconceivably blessed ; because, without intermission, they have been basking, as it were, in the beams of divine glory. But, when some intimation was given of the Divine purpose to restore to happiness our fallen race, what astonishment must have seized the whole heavenly choir ! They had seen millions of their own species consigned to misery, and hell itself created for their sad abode : and, when man had fallen, they could expect nothing, but that those who were partners in transgression should also be fellow-heirs of the doom assigned to it. But, when they saw that a purpose existed in the Divine mind to pardon man, an entire new view of the Deity must have struck their minds, and filled them with wonder and admiration. From that moment, the great mystery of redemption has been gradually unfolding to mankind : and by every discovery made to the Church, the angels themselves have gained a deeper insight into it. They were represented, under the Mosaic dispensation, by the two cherubim who covered the ark. Those were formed in a bending posture, looking down into the ark, as if desirous of discovering more fully the wonders contained in that typical emblematic ordinance°. St. Peter assures us of this ; when, speaking of the

° Exod. xxv. 20.

prophecies relating to the sufferings and glory of our Lord, he says, “Which things the angels desire to look into^p.” The very word he uses^q refers to their bending posture, which I have before mentioned. And that they are brought to more enlarged views of God’s glory in the face of Jesus Christ, by the revelation of it which is given to us, is expressly asserted by St. Paul; who says, that “God would have all men see what was the fellowship of the mystery which, from the beginning of the world, had been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ, to the intent that *now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God*^r. Hence we find that, at the incarnation of our Lord, a new song commenced in heaven: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men^s.” From that hour have they been contemplating all the wonders of his love: and still are they beholding the radiance of his glory, and of the glory of God beaming forth from his face; and from every discovery of the divine perfections they receive a still further augmentation of their bliss. Till the foregoing method of reconciling and glorifying the divine perfections had been revealed to us, the angels could have had no more conception of it than we. They had seen in the works of creation, and had experienced in their own bosoms, a marvellous display of the wisdom and goodness and power and love of Almighty God: but they could never have conceived the least idea of them, as they are exhibited in the gift of his only-begotten Son to die for man. All this they learn from the Gospel only: and, consequently, the Gospel, which has contributed so greatly to their happiness, has, on that very account, an excellency of glory deserving of the highest admiration.

And how is the happiness of man also advanced by this great salvation? Doubtless, as I have said before, he would have been happy, if he had never

^p 1 Pet. i. 12.

^q παρακλίνει.

^r Eph. iii. 9, 10.

^s Luke ii. 13, 14.

fallen. But what is his happiness in glory *now*! What views must HE have of the divine perfections! What a sense must he feel of “the love of Christ, the breadth and length, and depth and height, of which are utterly incomprehensible!” If, as beholding the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, man is on a par with angels, in this respect he is elevated far above them, in that he can say, in reference to the whole work of Christ, ‘All this was done for ME.’ When he beholds the Lord Jesus Christ in his human nature, he must say, ‘My God assumed that nature for ME.’ When he sees Christ “upon his throne, as a Lamb that has been slain,” and surveys the wounds once inflicted on his hands and side, he must say, ‘Those wounds were endured for ME.’ When he contemplates all the glory and felicity of heaven, he must say, ‘This throne was bought for ME; this crown for ME; this inheritance for ME; yes, and bought too with the blood of my incarnate God!’ Every smile of God the Father must be endeared to him, by the thought, that it was purchased for him by the agonies of God the Son, and secured to him by the agency of God the Spirit. Truly, this realizing sense of an interest in all the wonders of redemption must augment the felicity of the saints far beyond that of the angels themselves: and accordingly we find, that the saints are nearer to the throne of God than the angels themselves. “The saints stand round about the throne; and the angels stand round about the saints^t.” We find, too, that the saints lead the chorus, with an exulting acknowledgment of their own interest in Christ; saying, “Thou art worthy: for thou wast slain, and *hast redeemed us to God by thy blood*, out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation; and *hast made us unto our God kings and priests*.” But all that the angels can do, is to join in the acknowledgment that Christ is worthy: not one word can they add about their own interest in his work: all that they can say is, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive

^t Rev. vii. 9—11.

power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing:" therefore, " Blessing and honour and glory and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever^u."

Say now, Whether there be not a glory and excellency in the Gospel, not only beyond any thing which is generally contemplated, but far beyond what any finite capacity can ever fully comprehend? Yet, how is it regarded amongst us? Does it in any degree corresponding with its importance, occupy our minds as Christians, and our ministrations as ambassadors of Christ? On the contrary, is it not rather viewed with suspicion, and in too many instances loaded with contempt? But would it be so treated, if it were properly understood? See what effects are ascribed to it, and what blessings a just comprehension of this mysterious subject is calculated to impart. In my text it is said, that a view of this sublime mystery will "fill us with all the fulness of God." And what can be meant by this? Can it be supposed that a creature should ever resemble God in his *natural* perfections? No: but in his *moral* perfections we both *may* and *must* resemble him, if ever we would behold the face of God in peace. Nay more; we must not only partake of his moral perfections, but must have them all united and harmonizing in us, even as they unite and harmonize in God himself, and in this stupendous mystery, which has emanated from him. For instance; whilst justice, and mercy, and truth, and love, find in us, on all occasions, their appropriate operations, we must be careful that the opposite graces of faith and fear, humility and confidence, meekness and fortitude, contrition and joy, have full scope, not only for occasional, but for constant and harmonious exercise. In a word, we should resemble "God, who is light" itself^x. In light, you know, there is an assemblage of widely-different rays; some of which,

^u Rev. v. 9—13.

^x 1 John i. 5.

if taken separately, might be thought to approximate rather to darkness than to light. But if the more brilliant rays were taken alone, though they might produce a glare, they would never make light. It is the union of all, in their due proportion, and in simultaneous motion, that constitutes light : and then only, when all the different graces are in simultaneous exercise, each softening and tempering its opposite, then only, I say, do we properly resemble God.

But how shall this character be formed in us? How shall we “be filled thus with all the fulness of our God?” Can it be effected by philosophy, or by the operation of any natural principles? Can any thing but the Gospel of Christ effect it? No; nothing under heaven ever did, or ever can, form this character, but an overwhelming sense of the love of Christ in dying for us : *and it is on this account that I have endeavoured to bring this great subject before you.* And, O, that it might have a suitable operation upon your souls! Verily, it should fill the soul : it should produce in us somewhat of the effect which it is at this very moment producing in heaven. Behold both saints and angels, all of them prostrate on their face before the throne of God^y. And wherefore is it that those happy spirits are in such a posture as this? they are all, without exception, overwhelmed with admiring and adoring views of God and of the Lamb. And should not such be the prostration of our souls also, under a sense of the incomprehensible love of Christ, as revealed in the Gospel? Behold the seraphim in Isaiah’s vision : each of them had six wings ; with two of them covering his face, as unworthy to behold the Deity, and with two his feet, as unworthy to serve him ; and with the remaining two flying through the vast expanse of heaven, to fulfil their Maker’s will^z. Now this is the use that we also should make of our powers : humiliation and contrition should be united with zeal, throughout our

^y Rev. v. 8. and vii. 11.

^z Isai. vi. 2.

whole deportment: and if we so employ our powers, we may be sure that our progress in the divine life will be advanced, rather than impeded, by these holy self-abasing exercises. In truth, if with David we desire that “the beauty of the Lord our God may be upon us^a,” it is by this assemblage of graces, so qualified and so tempered, that we must attain the desired blessing.

And now let me entreat, that all, who have heard the subjects which have been discussed, will bear in mind their true scope and intent. Let our aim be high: let our desires be enlarged: let none of us be satisfied with low attainments in religion: let us be content with nothing less than being “filled with all the fulness of God.” Let us take our incarnate God himself for our pattern: for we are expressly told, that “he has set us an example, that we should follow his steps^b.” “Let the same mind be in us which was also in Christ Jesus^c,” that so “Christ himself may be formed in us^d.” You have seen what self-denial he exercised for *us*: what then, I would ask, should we not be ready either to do or to suffer for *him*? Should there be any bounds to our gratitude and zeal and love? Truly, if we be not brought to a sense of his love, and a corresponding devotedness of heart to him, I shall have spoken in vain, or rather worse than in vain: for “the word, which should have been a savour of life to our salvation, will only prove a savour of death,” to our heavier condemnation^e. But I trust you will not suffer the subject to pass from your minds with the occasion that has brought it before you; but that you will seek to experience it, in all its sanctifying and saving efficacy. Let “the love of Christ” be contemplated by you, till it has “constrained you to live altogether unto him:” and never cease to “behold, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, till you are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord^f.”

^a Ps. xc. 17.

^b 1 Pet. ii. 21.

^c Phil. ii. 5.

^d Gal. iv. 19.

^e 2 Cor. ii. 16.

^f 2 Cor. iii. 18.

And now, having closed my subject, I humbly “commend you all to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified^g.”

^g Acts xx. 32.

MMCCXXVI.

CHRIST CAME TO SAVE SINNERS.

1 Tim. i. 15. *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*

IT is said of the Athenians that “they spent their time in nothing else but in telling or hearing some new thing.” This, to say the least, was a very unprofitable way of employing their precious hours: for of the reports that are most industriously circulated, many are false, many doubtful, many frivolous; and of those that are true and important, the far greater part do not properly concern us. But there is one report that has spread far and wide, in which we are all deeply interested; the *particulars of which, together with the general character of the report itself*, it is our intention to lay before you.

I. The report itself—

In general the report is, that “Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.” But because of its singular importance, it will be proper that we enter into *particulars*, and tell you distinctly,

1. Who Jesus Christ was—

[He was a man in every respect like ourselves, sin only excepted. But he was God also: he was the only-begotten Son of God, “God of God, light of light, very God of very God.” To declare *fully* who he was, is beyond the power of any finite being: since “none knoweth the Son but the Father^a,” yet we know infallibly from Scripture that he was the eternal^b, immutable Jehovah^c, God manifest in the flesh^d, God over all, blessed for ever^e.]

^a Matt. xi. 27.

^b Mic. v. 2. with John xvii. 5.

^c Heb. xiii. 8.

^d 1 Tim. iii. 16.

^e Rom. ix. 5.

2. How he came into the world—

[He was *born* like other men; but he was *not begotten* in the way of ordinary generation. He was formed by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of a pure virgin, that he might partake of our nature without inheriting our corruption^f. He was born under circumstances of peculiar meanness: his life also was spent in poverty and disgrace: and his death was the most cruel and ignominious that could be inflicted on him. But he foreknew from the beginning all that he should suffer, and yet voluntarily took upon him our nature, that he might both do and suffer all that was appointed of the Father.]

3. For what end he came into the world—

[Never was there such an errand before, or since. His own creatures had ruined themselves; and he came to save them. Though it was *his* law that they transgressed, and *his* authority that they despised, and *his* yoke that they cast off; yea, though he was the one great object of their contempt and abhorrence, he came to save them. Though he knew that they would murder him as soon as ever he should put himself into their power, yet he came to save them; to save the vilest of them, not excepting those who unrighteously condemned him, or insultingly mocked him, or cruelly pierced him with the nails and spear. When there was no alternative but either that they must perish, or he come down from heaven to suffer in their stead, down he came upon the wings of love, and “saved them from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for them^g.” He suffered that they might go free; and died, that they might live for ever.]

That this is “not a cunningly-devised fable,” will appear, if we consider what is said in the text respecting,

II. The character of this report—

St. Paul, who had examined it thoroughly, declares that it is,

1. Worthy of credit—

[So strange a report as this ought on no account to be believed, unless it can be proved beyond a possibility of doubt. Credulity in a concern that so deeply involves the honour of God and the welfare of all the human race, would be criminal in the highest degree. But we need be under no apprehensions respecting the truth of this report. “It is a *faithful*

^f Luke i. 35.^g Gal. iii. 13.

saying:" it is attested by the accomplishment of prophecies the most numerous, the most minute, the most opposite and irreconcilable; of prophecies, which no human wisdom could have devised, no human power could accomplish. It has been credited by thousands who were at first most adverse to it: it has always appeared with more convincing evidence in proportion as it has been scrutinized and examined: and multitudes have propagated it at the peril of their lives, and sealed the truth of it with their blood. There is no species of evidence wanting to confirm it: so that it is impossible to doubt of its truth, if only we inquire into it with diligence and candour.]

2. Worthy of acceptance—

[There are many reports that are true, which yet are unworthy of any serious concern. But *this* is so universally interesting, and withal so precious, that it is worthy to be received by all mankind with the liveliest joy and exultation. If it be considered only as affecting the *present* happiness of men, there is no other report deserving of the smallest attention in comparison of this. None but God can tell, how many myriads of souls it has delivered from the deepest distress and anguish, and filled with peace and joy unspeakable. In truth, there is no *solid* comfort upon earth but what arises from the belief of these joyful tidings. But if we extend our views to the *eternal* felicity which the crediting of this report has occasioned; if we look at the myriads of saints that are already around the throne of God, and consider what numbers are continually adding to them from this lower world, and what an innumerable host there will be at the last day, that will have been rescued from hell, and exalted to glory *solely* through their crediting of this report, surely we shall say it is "worthy of *all* acceptance," worthy, not merely to be credited, but to be entertained in our hearts with the devoutest gratitude and thanksgiving.]

We shall CONCLUDE with recommending "this saying" to the attention of,

1. Those who have lived in a wilful course of sin—

[You cannot but have some secret apprehension that "your end will be according to your ways." How acceptable then ought these tidings to be to you! Do not despise them. Do not aggravate your eternal condemnation by rejecting them; neither put them from you, as though they were too good to be true: for Christ came to save even the very "chief of sinners;" and *you*, if you will believe on him, shall experience his salvation.]

2. Those who have been more exemplary in their lives—

Do not imagine that you are able to save yourselves: if you have not been such profligate sinners as others, still you are “sinners,” and must be saved by Jesus Christ, or not at all. You are but too apt to overlook all that Christ has done and suffered for you, under an idea that your moral and religious duties will conciliate the Divine favour: and hence it too often happens, that, while “publicans and harlots enter into his kingdom, persons of your description exclude themselves from it. But know, that “there is salvation in no other:” Christ is, and must be, your only refuge, and your only hope^h.]

3. Those who have already received it into their hearts—

[Doubtless this report has already been a source of joy and consolation to you. But you cannot even conceive how rich a source of blessings it will be, if only you continue to reflect upon it. In it are contained “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledgeⁱ:” it has a height, and depth, and length, and breadth, that no finite being can comprehend^k, and that through eternal ages will afford incessant and increasing cause for wonder and adoration. Let this report then be your meditation day and night, and while *we*, as God’s ambassadors, endeavour to propagate it with *our lips*, do you endeavour to recommend and confirm it by *your lives*.]

^h Acts iv. 12.

ⁱ Col. ii. 3.

^k Eph. iii. 18, 19.

MMCCXXVII.

PAUL’S CONVERSION.

1 Tim. i. 16. *For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.*

THE first question that should occur to our minds, is this, Have I obtained mercy? If a favourable answer can be returned to that, we should inquire, In what manner, and for what ends, mercy has been shewn us? There can be no doubt, but that if persons who are converted to God would frequently look back upon the state in which they were previous

to their conversion, they would find the retrospect attended with the most beneficial consequences. Their recollection would furnish them with innumerable facts, which would tend to humble them in the dust, and to excite adoring thoughts of that grace which has so distinguished them. St. Paul appears to have taken peculiar pleasure in this exercise of mind. He embraces every opportunity to speak of his former hostility to Christ, in order to exalt to the uttermost the honour of that God, by whom he had been elected, redeemed, and sanctified. In the preceding verses he had expatiated on this painful subject: and now he improves it for the benefit of others.

In discoursing on his words, we shall notice,

I. The circumstances under which the Apostle obtained mercy—

If St. Paul had more to boast of than any, on account of his birth, his education, his strictness, and his zeal, he had also more to be humbled for than almost any other person. For consider,

1. His ignorance of himself—

[He had been educated under the most celebrated teacher of his day, Gamaliel; and had made a proficiency beyond any of his age. Yet, skilled as he was in Rabbinical learning, he was wholly ignorant of his own *state* and *character*. He knew not that he was a condemned sinner. He knew not the spirituality and extent of the law. He had no idea, that it required perfect unsinning obedience, and consigned men over to perdition for one single offence, whether in thought, word, or deed. Through his ignorance of the law, he imagined himself to be “alive,” and entitled to everlasting life^a. He moreover judged that he was practising all the moral duties, while he was destitute of almost every just sentiment, or proper feeling. Instead of being humbled as a sinner in dust and ashes, he was lifted up with pride and self-conceit. Instead of being animated with love, and pity, and compassion, he was inflamed with a fiery and wrathful zeal. “He knew not at all what spirit he was of.” In short, he was the very reverse of what he afterwards became.]

2. His enmity against Christ—

^a Rom. vii. 9.

[He might have had many opportunities of seeing and hearing Christ, on a supposition he had chosen to embrace them. But, like proud and ignorant bigots of later ages, he would not condescend to hear one who was so generally despised. He probably believed all the scandalous reports that were circulated respecting Jesus, and therefore thought him unworthy of his attention. From the prophecies indeed he could not but know that the promised Messiah was to appear about that time: but having imbibed the prejudices of his countrymen respecting a temporal Messiah, he concluded that Jesus was an impostor; and no doubt rejoiced when the influence of that deceiver (as he thought him) was terminated by his death. But when the doctrines of the Gospel were propagated with such success by the Apostles, then his disappointment appeared, and he broke forth into the fiercest rage against Christ. He determined to extirpate his followers, and to blot out, if possible, the very remembrance of his name. Such was his opinion of Christ, that “he thought he ought to do every thing in his power contrary to his name^b,” and adverse to his cause. Nor can we doubt, but that if Jesus had put himself again in the power of the Jews, Paul would have been among the first to apprehend and destroy him. None would have been found more ready than he to nail him to the cross, or to pierce his heart with the spear.]

3. His cruelty to his fellow-creatures—

[He was present at the stoning of the first martyr, Stephen. He heard the discourse of that holy man; he saw “his face shining like the face of an angel:” he heard him with his dying breath praying for his murderers; but was unconvinced, unrelenting, unmoved. One would have thought that a *young* man (whose feelings are quick), and a man pretending to morality, should have felt some pity towards one, whose whole appearance was so devout and holy: and that, when the first stone made the blood to gush out, he should have turned away with disgust and horror. But no such effect was produced on him. On the contrary, he feasted his eyes with this bloody spectacle; and testified his consent to the murderous deed, by holding the garments of the murderers, and giving in his looks very evident tokens of his approbation^c. Having thus tasted of human blood, he thirsted for it, and, like a blood-hound, would be satisfied with nothing else. He volunteered his services in hunting down the victims of his rage^d. He obtained authority from the chief priests; and in the exercise of it, not only drove the Christians from Jerusalem, but followed them to

^b Acts xxvi. 9.

^c Acts vii. 58. and viii. 1. and xxii. 19, 20.

^d Acts ix. 2:

foreign cities, where he had no jurisdiction^e. He shewed no pity even to helpless females; but dragged all, men and women, to prison^f, and gave his voice against them that they should be put to death^g. He suffered none to escape, on any other condition than that of blaspheming the name of Jesus^h; and thus, while he inflicted on some the pains of martyrdom, he consigned others over to the damnation of hell. From his own description of himself, he more resembled an incarnate fiend than a human beingⁱ.]

So strange were the circumstances under which this fiery bigot obtained mercy, that we are peculiarly concerned to inquire into,

II. The ends for which mercy was vouchsafed to him—

Doubtless many blessed ends were answered. But, without attempting to enumerate them, we shall notice those only that are specified in the text. It was,

1. For “the manifesting of Christ’s patience and long-suffering”—

[The long-suffering of Christ appears in the forbearance he exercises towards mankind at large. It was eminently conspicuous in his conduct towards the antediluvian world, whose wickedness he endured for the space of a hundred and twenty years^k. It was wonderfully displayed also in not executing the most signal vengeance on his cruel adversary, and setting him forth as a distinguished monument of his wrath and indignation. But how truly wonderful does it appear, when we see him stopping this blood-thirsty persecutor in the midst of his career, and revealing his pardoning love and mercy to his soul! To take such a viper to his bosom! to make such a creature “an elect vessel,” an eminent saint, a distinguished Apostle! to exalt such an one to the most honourable service on earth, and the highest throne in glory! how does this love surpass all knowledge and all conception! How is Jesus now glorified *in him*! and how must he be admired *in him* for ever, both in the Church militant, and the Church triumphant^l!

This then was one principal end of so marvellous a conversion, namely, that the exceeding riches of the Redeemer’s grace

^e Acts xxvi. 10, 11. ^f Acts viii. 3. and xxii. 4, 5.

^g Acts xxvi. 10. ^h Acts xxvi. 11.

ⁱ Acts ix. 1. Gal. i. 13. and 1 Tim. i. 13. ^k 1 Pet. iii. 20.

^l 2 Thess. i. 10.

might be displayed before the whole universe, both in time and eternity.]

2. For the encouraging of sinners to believe in him—

[It is not uncommon for persons to apprehend themselves so vile that they cannot be forgiven. But our blessed Lord has given a most effectual antidote to this in the conversion of Paul. It is not without reason that Paul repeatedly styles himself “the chief of sinners^m :” and he expressly tells us, that he was designed to be a “pattern to all who should hereafter believe on Jesus.” Our adorable Saviour points, as it were, to him, and says; ‘See, thou tempted soul, if thou art as blind as that infuriated bigot, I can make “the scales to fall from thine eyesⁿ :” if thine enmity against me be as rooted as his, I can slay it: if thou possessest all that is malignant and diabolical, I can change thee: there is nothing too great for me to do, nothing too good for me to give, even to the chief of sinners. I am the same gracious and almighty Saviour that I was in the day that I converted him; and I am able and willing to do the very same things for thee. Thou seest how freely I bestowed my grace on him. If wrath and malice, and murder and blasphemy, could entitle him to my favour, then certainly he had as good a title as man could have: but if these things rather entitled him to a distinguished place in hell, then thou seest how free and sovereign my grace is; and hast a proof, that “where sin has abounded, grace can, and shall, much more abound^o.”’]

Who, after beholding this pattern, can despond? Who will put away mercy from him under the idea that he is *unworthy* of it? Who will be afraid to come to Jesus, because he has no good work to bring as a *price* of his favour? None that reflect on the salvation of Paul, can ever doubt either the freeness of Christ’s offers, or the sufficiency of his grace.]

There are two things which, on account of their singular importance, we will further endeavour to IMPRESS upon your minds :

1. No good that can be possessed will supersede our need of mercy—

[Paul, as has been hinted at before, had much to boast of^p : but, notwithstanding all his learning, and strictness, and zeal, he had perished for ever, if he had not “obtained mercy.” Let

^m ἐμοὶ πρῶτον should have been so translated in the text, as it is in the verse before it.

ⁿ Acts ix. 18.

^o Rom. v. 20.

^p Phil. iii. 4—6.

all consider this; and, renouncing all dependence on themselves, trust in Christ alone, and seek “*life everlasting*” solely “*by believing in him*” — — —]

2. No evil that can have been committed, shall exclude us from mercy, if we believe on Christ—

[This is the grand scope of the text, and of the discourse upon it. But it never can be repeated too often, or impressed too earnestly on the heart and conscience. It is uniformly attested by all the inspired writers^q. May God help us to believe the record; and cause us all to experience its truth! If our guilt have been as extraordinary as Paul’s, it may, for ought we know, have been permitted, on purpose that, like him, we may be extraordinary monuments of grace. At all events, we may urge it as a plea with God, that he will be transcendently glorified in our salvation^r.]

^q Isai. i. 18. and lv. 7. and Acts xiii. 39.

^r Ps. xxv. 11.

MMCCXXVIII.

SALVATION FOR ALL.

1 Tim. ii. 3, 4. *God our Saviour . . . will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.*

IT is truly lamentable to see how men, in every age, have strained and wrested the Holy Scriptures, in order to make them speak the language of their own particular creed. Some, averse to the idea that God should express his good-will to all the sinners of mankind, limit the word “all,” and make it signify nothing more than *some of all descriptions and characters*; whilst others run to a contrary extreme, and deduce from this expression a persuasion that *none shall ever perish*. It were well, if, instead of contending for human systems, and especially those of Calvin and Arminius, we were content to receive the Scriptures with the simplicity of little children: for, after all that has been said or written in support of those two most prominent systems, it is impossible to reduce the Holy Scriptures either to the one or to the other of them: for, on both hypotheses, there are difficulties which can never be surmounted, and contrarieties which man can never reconcile. It is by

attempting to be wise above what is written, that we involve ourselves in all these difficulties. If we would be content to take the Scriptures as they are, and to leave the reconciling of them unto God, by whose inspiration they were written, we should find them all admirably calculated to produce the ends for which they were designed. How delightful is the truth here intimated! and how strange is it, that, instead of enjoying it, and adoring God for it, men will make it only a ground of acrimonious contention! I thank God, that all the Scriptures, whatever be their bearing, are alike acceptable to me; and that, whether they mark the sovereignty or the mercy of God, I am alike ready to prosecute them, in accordance with their plain and obvious meaning. By attending to the original, we shall often find our way clear, when, from a diversity of idiom, a translation scarcely conveys the precise idea. The passage before us, for instance, does not convey in the original any thing like a secret *determination* in God, but only a *willingness*, that all should be saved: it is precisely parallel with what is spoken by St. Peter, when he says, “God is long-suffering to us-ward; not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance^a.” And this is assigned as a reason why God would have us pray for all men. Our intercessions for them are pleasing and acceptable to him, because “he is willing to save *all*,” without exception and without reserve.

In the words before us, then, we see,

I. The disposition of God towards our fallen race—

We are not to understand the text as expressing any decree, either in reference to some favoured individuals, or in reference to all mankind. We have said, that it imports only a willingness to save; and that in that sense it has no limit whatever; the whole human race being objects of his tender compassion, and equally accepted of him, when they seek him in his appointed way^b.

^a 2 Pet. iii. 9.

^b Acts x. 34, 35.

1. For all, without exception, has God given his only dear Son—

[This is affirmed by our Lord himself: “God so loved the *world*, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that *whosoever* believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life^c.” And with this agrees what God spoke to the Messiah by the Prophet Isaiah; “I will give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be *my salvation to the ends of the earth*^d.” With this agrees also what is spoken in immediate connexion with my text: “Christ gave himself a ransom for *all*, to be testified in due time^e.”]

2. To all has he commanded also his Gospel to be preached—

[“Go into *all the world*,” says our Lord, “and preach the Gospel to *every creature*^f.” How amazing is it, that, after such a command, any should call in question the propriety of offering salvation indiscriminately to every child of man! Nor is it the mere tidings of the Gospel that we are to proclaim; but we are to “preach expressly repentance and remission of sins, in the name of Christ, to *all the nations* upon earth,” and to every individual under heaven^g. Wherever there is a sinner doomed to wrath, there is a person in whose ears the voice of mercy should be made to sound.]

3. Nor is there a human being whom God is not willing to receive—

[What can be the meaning of that invitation, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, *all the ends of the earth*^h?” or of that, “Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; come, buy wine and milk, without money and without priceⁱ?” What can our Lord mean, when he says, “Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out^k?” It can import nothing less than what St. Paul has said: “There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord is rich unto *all that call upon him*: for *whosoever* shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved^l.”]

4. God has made these things the subject of the strongest possible asseveration—

[To the whole world does God *appeal* respecting it: “Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die, saith the Lord, and not that he should return from his ways and

^c John iii. 16.

^d Isai. xlix. 6.

^e ver. 6.

^f Matt. xxviii. 9. Mark xvi. 15.

^g Luke xxiv. 47.

^h Isai. xlv. 22. ⁱ Isai. lv. 1.

^k John vi. 37.

^l Rom. x. 12, 13.

live^m?" What answer can any man, who maintains the doctrine of absolute reprobation, return to this? But, to put the matter beyond the possibility of doubt, God makes it also the subject of a solemn *oath*: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israelⁿ?" Verily, if such declarations determine not the point, there is no certainty in language: but if they do, in what an endearing light is God here set forth to us; and with what delight should we contemplate him under the character of "GOD OUR SAVIOUR!"]

We must not, however, forget to notice,

II. The means whereby his gracious purposes are to be accomplished—

There is but one way of salvation for fallen man—

[“I am the way, the truth, and the life, saith the Lord Jesus: no man cometh unto the Father but by me^o.” This is plain and positive: and it is confirmed by many passages of Holy Writ, that are equally plain, and equally express: “Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ^p.” And again: “There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ^q.”]

And this way of salvation must be known and embraced—

[“By his knowledge,” says God, “shall my righteous servant justify many^r.” An unknown Saviour is no Saviour at all. There may, it is true, be different degrees of knowledge required, agreeably to the different degrees of information that we have received. The Jews, before the coming of Christ, could not be expected to have such clear views of him as we possess, because he was not then so fully revealed. As to what shall be required of the heathen, we know but little: nor is it for us to determine what God shall do respecting them. But, in relation to ourselves, the matter is clear: *we* must know the Saviour, every one of us for ourselves: for “this is life eternal,” says our Lord, “to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent^s.” On the other hand, “to them that know not God, and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, God will come to take

^m Ezek. xviii. 23.

ⁿ Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

^o John xiv. 6.

^p 1 Cor. iii. 11.

^q Acts iv. 12.

^r Isai. liii. 11.

^s John xvii. 3.

vengeance on them" in the great and awful day^t. In confirmation of this truth, St. Peter appeals even to our own consciences: "What shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God^u?" Our text informs us, that we must "come to the knowledge of the truth," yea, and to the *acknowledgment* of it also^x. In other words, we must believe in Jesus Christ for the remission of our sins, and must make him all our hope and all our salvation: then shall the blessings of grace and glory be accorded to us, and all God's purposes of love be accomplished in us.]

From hence we may SEE,

1. Whence it is that any are saved—

[To God alone must all the glory be given, if so much as one be ever admitted to the realms of bliss. For what but his love provided a Saviour for us? or what but his grace ever enabled us to believe in him? Never had we "come to the knowledge of the truth," if he had not revealed it in our hearts; nor would it ever have proved effectual for us, if his almighty power had not made use of it for the renovation and salvation of our souls. It was "He, and he alone, who of his good pleasure wrought in us either to will or do" what was acceptable in his sight^y.]

2. Whence it is that any perish—

[To none but ourselves can any blame attach in this matter. Even the most ignorant heathen are "without excuse," because they walk not according to the light they have^z. And as for us, to whom the Gospel is revealed, our blessed Lord complains, "How often would I have gathered you, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not^a!" The fault is altogether in yourselves: "ye will not come unto me, that ye may have life^b." Yes, brethren, I testify against you this day, that whatever excuses you may now urge, when the Judge of quick and dead shall call you to account, you will be "speechless" (muzzled), even as he was who had not on the wedding-garment^c: and to all eternity will your anguish be inconceivably enhanced by this reflection, that, in all you suffer, you reap only the fruit of your own obstinacy and unbelief.]

^t 2 Thess. i. 8.

^u 1 Pet. iv. 17.

^x ἐπίγνωσιν.

^y Phil. ii. 12, 13.

^z Rom. i. 20.

^a Matt. xxiii. 37.

^b John v. 40.

^c Matt. xxii. 12. ἐφιδύω.

MMCCXXIX.

THE MEDIATION OF CHRIST.

1 Tim. ii. 5, 6. *There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.*

IT is deeply to be regretted that the Holy Scriptures, instead of being improved for the ends for which they were given, have been made an occasion of the most bitter contentions by the very persons who have most professed to reverence their authority. Men have not been satisfied with receiving the dictates of inspiration with child-like simplicity, but have determined to reduce them to systems of their own; and have wrested to their own views every passage that militated against their pre-conceived opinions. The partisans on either side have been equally guilty in this respect. Amongst modern controversialists, none have more divided the Church, or indulged more acrimonious feelings against each other, than Calvinists and Arminians. The one party have taken all those passages which represent God as a Sovereign, dispensing his blessings according to his own will and pleasure, and have made all the rest of the Scriptures bend to them: the other party have done the same with respect to the passages which assert the freedom of the human will, and which speak of men as the sole authors of their own condemnation. It seems never to enter into the minds of either party, that those passages which they set at variance, may, like wheels moving in opposite directions, be in perfect harmony with each other; and that there may be a subserviency, where they see nothing but direct opposition. If they were once brought to consider this, they would be more candid in their interpretation of each other's sentiments, and more cautious of wresting from their plain and obvious meaning the passages which they cannot reconcile with their own exclusive system. The words

we have just read are a strong-hold for those who adopt the sentiments which are called Arminian. And how does the Calvinist get over them? how does he make the universality of redemption accord with his particular election? He knows not how to do it in a way that shall agree with his own system; and therefore he denies at once that Christ did give himself a ransom for *all*; and says, that by "*all*" is meant *some* of every description, that is, some of all different ranks and orders of men, Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor. But how much better were it for men to confess their own ignorance, than thus to pervert the word of God! It is true that God acts as a Sovereign; and that salvation, from first to last, is all of grace, whether we can reconcile this truth with every other portion of God's word, or not: nor are we any more at liberty to distort the passages that *appear to* militate against this system, than Arminians are to misinterpret those which obstruct their views. There is beyond all doubt a harmony in all the parts of the inspired volume, though we cannot exactly see it: (not but that we might see it, and clearly too, if we entered fully into the idea of the subordination of one set of truths to another :) and if we determine to speak *all* that the Scripture speaks, and *as* the Scripture speaks it, we shall not be far from the very truth of God. This will not please the partisans of human systems: but it will, as far as such a plan is adopted, produce moderation in our own minds, and forbearance towards all who differ from us.

The way in which the text is introduced deserves particular attention. The Apostle inculcates the duty of "interceding, and giving thanks, for all men" without exception, but especially "for kings and all in authority," because on them in a very great degree depends the peace and welfare of the Church. As a reason for extending our regards to all, he observes, that God does so in the government of the world, and that Christ has done so in the exercise of redeeming love, seeing that he "had given himself a ransom for *all*." The Apostle, whatever be the subject

he is treating of, finds an easy and natural transition to Christ, and especially when speaking upon any thing connected with Christian love, of which the love of Christ to us is the great exemplar. This is discovered chiefly in his mediation between God and man : and of that mediation we are led to speak,

I. As ordained of God—

“ There is one God,” the Creator and Governor of all—

[Amongst the heathen “ there were gods many, and lords many ; but there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things^a.” “ He is the God of the Jews, and the God also of the Gentiles^b ;” and both the one and the other he will justify in the same way^c, “ having no respect of persons.” “ In every nation under heaven, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, shall be accepted of him^d.”]

He has also given one Mediator for all—

[He is justly offended with his creatures of mankind, because they have sinned against him. In respect of transgression they are altogether on a par with the fallen angels ; and might well have been left, like them, to perish in their sins. But God provided a Mediator for them, that through him reconciliation might be effected with them in perfect consistency with his own perfections. This Mediator is his only-begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who being in the form of God, and accounting it no robbery to be equal with God, was found in fashion as a man, and took upon him the form of a servant. This “ man, Christ Jesus,” is the “ one Mediator” between God and men. There *is* no other ; there *needs to be* no other ; seeing that he is equally the Mediator of all, and equally ready to effect reconciliation for every sinner under heaven. The typical mediators, Moses and Aaron, and the high-priests in all successive ages, executed their office for the Jews only : but Christ, whom they typified, is the Advocate of all, and “ a propitiation equally for the sins of the whole world.”]

Seeing then that God is alike the Father of all, distributing blessings to all with an indiscriminating hand ; and that he has given his own co-equal co-eternal Son to be alike the Mediator for all, it becomes us to testify our common concern for all, and to promote by every possible means their eternal welfare.]

^a 1 Cor. viii. 5, 6.

^b Rom. iii. 29.

^c Rom. iii. 30.

^d Acts x. 35.

Let us next view the mediation of Christ—

II. As executed by himself—

“ He gave himself a ransom” for sinful man—

[A ransom is a redemption-price. Man was in bondage to sin and Satan, death and hell; and to liberate him from this was the end of Christ’s mediation. But how was this deliverance to be effected? The law, which had been broken, must be honoured; and divine justice, which demanded the punishment of the offender, must be satisfied. But fallen man could neither honour the one, nor satisfy the other. Nothing was left for him, but to endure to all eternity the penalty which justice demanded and the law denounced. To render the salvation of man compatible with the rights of law and justice, Jesus assumed our nature, and “ was made man,” that in the nature which had sinned he might suffer, and by his own sufferings make an atonement for our transgressions. Having undertaken this great work, he executed it: and there being no other sacrifice sufficient for the occasion, “ he gave *himself* a ransom for us.” “ The blood of bulls and of goats could never take away sin.” They were acceptable to God as shadowing forth *his* sacrifice: but it was *his* sacrifice alone that could atone for sin, and effect the desired reconciliation between God and man: this therefore he offered, and, when the cup of bitterness was put into his hands, he drank it to the very dregs.]

And this he did “ for all ” without exception—

[To say that he died for the elect only, is neither scriptural nor true. He died for all: according as it is elsewhere said; “ We thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again^e.” If all be not ultimately saved by his death, it is not owing to any want of sufficiency in his sacrifice to procure acceptance for them, but to their own impenitence and unbelief. And if all do not come to him for an interest in his sacrifice, it is not owing to any decree of God that of necessity excludes them from a participation in the benefit, or to any want of inclination in the Lord Jesus Christ to save them, but to their own obstinacy in sin. Our Lord said to the whole Jewish nation, “ How often *would I* have gathered you, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings; but *ye would not*.” This is applicable to the whole human race; and at the last day it will be said to all the

^e 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

ungodly, and especially to those to whom the Gospel of salvation had been sent, "*I would, but ye would not.*"

Here again then we see the propriety of interesting ourselves with God in behalf of all, since for all without exception did Jesus die.]

It will be proper to consider the mediation of Christ yet farther,

III. As attested by the Holy Spirit—

This mediation was "to be testified of in due time"—

1. It has been abundantly attested by the Holy Spirit in times past—

[In the writings of the Old Testament it is fully declared. "He was cut off, but not for himself^f:" "he was wounded for our transgressions: the chastisement of our peace was upon him: the Lord laid on him the iniquities of us ALL^g." Of the New Testament this truth forms the sum and substance. When Jesus was just beginning his ministry, he was pointed out by his forerunner as "the Lamb of God that should take away the sin of the world^h." Our Lord spake of himself as "giving his life a ransom for manyⁱ." St. Paul tells us, that "we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins^k," and "reconciliation through the blood of his cross^l." St. Peter assures us, that "He bore our sins in his own body on the tree, and suffered, the just for the unjust^m." But it would be endless to accumulate passages; since the whole Scriptures testify of this blessed truth in every part. Suffice it to say, that it forms the one theme of all the glorified saints in heaven, who sing praises day and night "to Him who loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood;" saying, "Thou art worthy, for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nationⁿ."]

2. We also are called to testify of it at this time—

[To preach Christ crucified is the one employment of ministers: and our ministry is called "the ministry of reconciliation" on this very account, because we proclaim to sinners, "that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them^o." O that our testi-

^f Dan. ix. 26.

^g Isai. liii. 4—6.

^h John i. 29.

ⁱ Matt. xx. 28.

^k Eph. i. 7.

^l Col. i. 20—22.

^m 1 Pet. ii. 24. and iii. 18.

ⁿ Rev. i. 5. and v. 9.

^o 2 Cor. v. 18—21.

mony amongst you on this subject were more fully credited, and more deeply felt! We do declare it: we declare it with joy: for “it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, even the chief^p.” None are excluded from an interest in him, but through their own fault. God has no pleasure in the death of any sinner^q. He even condescends to confirm this truth with an oath^r. St. Paul bears witness to it in the verse before our text. St. Peter also confirms it, and assures us, that “God is not willing that *any* should perish, but that all should come to repentance and live^s.” And, to add no more, St. John says, “If *any* man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins; and *not for ours only*, but also for the sins of *the whole world*^t.” Away with the systems that discard these blessed truths, and wrest from their obvious meaning these reviving declarations. Believe it, brethren, that Jesus “gave himself a ransom for *all*,” and know, that at this moment he addresses you by my mouth, saying, “Look unto me and be ye saved, *all the ends of the earth*; for I am God, and there is none else^u.”]

O brethren,

1. Stand amazed at this mystery—

[“Great indeed is this mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh,” and dying under the load of his creatures’ sins. Whence is it that this mystery is so little contemplated amongst us, and so little felt? Is it that there is any other subject which deserves our attention in comparison of it? No: there is nothing worth a thought in comparison of it. “For the excellency of the knowledge of it, all that the world holds dear is but dung and dross.” Let it then occupy your minds day and night, and fill your souls with transport, as it does the souls of the glorified before the throne of God.]

2. Improve it for the salvation of your own souls—

[On your acceptance of this testimony your everlasting salvation depends. “If you believe in Christ, your salvation is sure; if not, you are condemned already, and the wrath of God abideth on you^x.” Believe then, every one of you, that Christ died for *you*; and pray to God, that you may be able to see your interest in him, and with joyful confidence to exclaim, “He hath loved *ME*, and given himself for *ME*^y.” Thus shall you be feasted with the foretastes of heaven, and grow up into an increasing meekness for the glory prepared for you.]

p 1 Tim. i. 15. q Ezek. xviii. 23, 32. r Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

s 2 Pet. iii. 9. t 1 John ii. 1, 2. u Isai. xlv. 22.

x John iii. 18, 36. y Gal. ii. 20.

MMCCXXX.

THE GREAT MYSTERY OF GODLINESS.

1 Tim. iii. 16. *Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.*

IT has been often said by infidels, that, where mystery begins, religion ends. But, if this were true, there would be no uniformity or consistency in the works of God. All his works both of creation and providence are full of mysteries: there is not any one substance, of which we know *all* the properties, or any one event, for which we can assign *all* the reasons. If then there were nothing in religion above the comprehension of man, it would afford a strong presumption, that our religion was not from heaven: for why should it be revealed, if man could have devised it without a revelation? But the inspired writers represent the Gospel as “the wisdom of God in a mystery^a,” as “a mystery hid from ages^b,” and “kept secret from the foundation of the world^c:” they speak of many of its fundamental doctrines as a mystery^d, a great mystery^e, a gloriously rich mystery^f; and of its ministers as “stewards of the mysteries of God^g.” In the words before us, many of the principal events, relating to Christ, and the establishment of his religion in the world, are enumerated, and confessedly declared to be a “great mystery.” Let us then contemplate them in their order, and enter with deepest reverence into the investigation of them.

I. “God was manifest in the flesh”—

[It was not a mere creature that took upon him our nature, but God himself, as the Scriptures both of the Old^h

^a 1 Cor. ii. 7.

^b Col. i. 26.

^c Rom. xvi. 25.

^d 1 Cor. xv. 51.

^e Eph. i. 9. and v. 32.

^f Col. i. 27.

^g 1 Cor. iv. 1.

^h Isai. ix. 6. and vii. 14. with Matt. i. 23.

and New Testamentⁱ uniformly assert. He had for many ages manifested himself in the Shechinah, the bright cloud that first abode upon the tabernacle, and afterwards resided in the most holy place of the temple: but at the appointed time he assumed our very nature, with all its sinless infirmities, into a real union with himself, and dwelt substantially on earth in the person of Jesus Christ^k.

What an astonishing mystery was this! that the Creator of all things should become a creature, and that the infinitely *holy* God should be made “in the likeness of *sinful* flesh^l!” Let us incessantly adore him for this his ineffable condescension, his incomprehensible love.]

II. He was “justified in (or *by*) the Spirit”—

[So deep was the humiliation of Christ throughout the whole period of his sojourning on earth, that he needed the most signal evidences from heaven to justify his pretensions, and to vindicate his character from the charges of blasphemy and imposture. The office of justifying him was committed to the Holy Spirit, who visibly interposed on many occasions to attest his divine mission. When our Lord submitted to baptism, and thereby seemed to acknowledge himself a sinner, who needed to be washed in the laver of regeneration, the Spirit bore witness to him as God’s beloved Son, and as the spotless Lamb that was to take away the sin of the world^m. When he was accounted a deceiver, and a confederate with the devil, the Spirit enabled him to work the most stupendous miracles in proof of his being the true Messiahⁿ. When he was dead, and imprisoned in the grave, so that his very Disciples thought they had been deceived by him, the Spirit raised him from the dead^o, and thereby declared him to be the Son of God with power^p. And when Christ had, as it were, staked the whole credit of his Messiahship on the descent of the Holy Spirit after his own ascension to heaven, the Holy Spirit did descend according to his word, and not only rested visibly on the Apostles, but endued them with power to speak divers languages, and to confirm their word with signs following^q.

And is not this a mystery, that God should reduce himself to such an abject state as to need these attestations to his character; and that the Third Person in the ever-blessed Trinity should be thus necessitated, as it were, to “glorify

ⁱ John i. 1. Rom. ix. 5. Phil. ii. 6. John x. 30.

^k Col. ii. 9.

^l Rom. viii. 3.

^m John i. 29—34.

ⁿ Matt. xii. 24—28. ^o 1 Pet. iii. 18.

^p Rom. i. 4.

^q John xv. 26. Acts ii. 3, 4. Heb. ii. 4.

him," in order to counterbalance the offence which his humiliation had occasioned^r?]

III. He was "seen of angels"—

[The angels had beheld his face, and had worshipped before his throne from the first moment of their existence: but when he became incarnate, they had views of him, which, before that period, they could not have conceived. How did they exult when they saw him a helpless babe lying in a manger^s! But what different feelings must have been excited in their breasts, when they beheld him conflicting with Satan in the wilderness, and sinking under the load of his Father's wrath in the garden of Gethsemane, and in both seasons needing their friendly aid^t! Nothing is spoken of their viewing him on the cross; but doubtless they, who had been so deeply interested about him from his very birth to the hour of his crucifixion, could not but gaze upon him with astonishment and sympathy in his expiring moments. And how gladly did they obey the mandate to confound his adversaries, and to rescue him from the tomb^u! With what joy did they attest his resurrection^x, and wait upon him in his ascension to the highest heavens^y, and announce his intention to return again, in like manner as he had ascended, to judge the world^z!

It is perhaps to these testimonies which the angels bore to Jesus, rather than to the mere circumstance of their seeing him, that the Apostle alludes in the words of our text. And surely, if it be mysterious, that the Spirit of God should bear testimony to him, it is no less a mystery, that his own creatures should be employed in such an office.]

IV. He was "preached unto the Gentiles, and believed on" by them—

[The Jews, who had for two thousand years been the peculiar people of God, could not conceive that any but their own nation should be admitted to the Divine favour: and indeed, to such a degree were the Gentiles immersed in ignorance and sin, that they seemed as if they were utterly excluded from the hope of mercy. But "God's thoughts were not as man's thoughts, or his ways as man's ways:" for, by his express appointment, the Gospel was preached to all nations, and salvation through Christ was proclaimed to every creature. The Apostle himself had been the honoured

^r John xvi. 7—11, 14.

^s Luke ii. 12—14.

^t Matt. iv. 11. Luke xxii. 43.

^u Matt. xxviii. 2—4.

^x Matt. xxviii. 5, 6.

^y Ps. lxviii. 17, 18.

^z Acts i. 10, 11.

instrument of conveying this mercy to them; and had the happiness of seeing, that he had not laboured in vain, or run in vain. There were multitudes in every place who received the word with all readiness of mind, and rested all their hopes of salvation on their incarnate God. Their prejudices vanished; their passions were overcome; and their whole souls were subdued to the obedience of faith.

And were not these things also mysterious, that the poor idolatrous Gentiles should have such glad tidings proclaimed to them; and that he, who had not saved himself, should be regarded as the Saviour of the whole world?]

V. He “was received up into glory”—

[The return of Jesus to his heavenly mansions is generally thought to be here referred to: but perhaps the reference rather is to the glorious reception which he met with among those who believed on him^a: they did not merely assent to the truth of his Gospel, but received him into their hearts with most fervent love. “No sooner did they hear of him, than they obeyed him^b,” and accounted his service to be perfect freedom: and so unreserved was their surrender of themselves to him, that they desired “every thought,” as well as every action, “to be brought into captivity” to his will^c. In short, they “counted all things but dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord;” nor were their goods, their reputation, their liberty, or their life, of any value, when put in competition with his will, or when an opportunity was offered to sacrifice them to his honour^d.

Such was the reception given him wherever his name was preached: multitudes in every place “blessed themselves in him^e,” and “rejoiced in him with joy unspeakable^f.” And what a glorious mystery was this! that foreigners should so highly honour one who had not only been abhorred by all his own countrymen, but had been executed by them as the vilest of malefactors! and that men of every nation under heaven should feel such love to one whom they had never seen, as to renounce for his sake all that their eyes had seen, and all that was held dear among them! This was wonderful indeed: yet,

^a It seems that the different members of the text received their accomplishment in a successive order of time: and, if this be duly considered, the interpretation here given to the last clause will appear the most suitable of any: and it is certain that ἀνελήφθη ἐν δόξῃ may very properly be translated, *he was received gloriously*. See in the Greek, Acts xx. 13, 14. Phil. iv. 19. with other passages referred to by that most instructive and judicious commentator, Dr. Guyse.

^b Ps. xviii. 44.

^c 2 Cor. x. 5.

^d Phil. iii. 7, 8.

^e Ps. lxxii. 17.

^f 1 Pet. i. 8.

wonderful as it is, it is still daily experienced, and daily manifested, by all that believe.]

We CONCLUDE with submitting to your consideration two important QUESTIONS :

1. What reception have you given to this mystery ?

[Are the great subjects of Christ's humiliation and glory entertained by you with that reverence which is due to such mysterious truths? I thank God they are preached among you; but are they not in too many instances neglected by you, instead of meeting with that reception they deserve? — — — Beg then that the Holy " Spirit would take of the things that are Christ's and shew them unto you^g." And endeavour to give the Lord Jesus such a reception now, that you may be welcomed by him in the great day of his appearing.]

2. Are you experiencing the Gospel to be indeed a mystery of *godliness* ?

[It is to but little purpose to " call Christ Lord, if we do not the things which he says." He will " save us *from* our sins;" but never *in* them. He came to " redeem us from iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works^h." Let us not then attempt to make him " a minister of sinⁱ;" but endeavour to shew the sanctifying, as well as saving, efficacy of his Gospel. Let us shew, that while " the grace of God bringeth salvation to us, it teaches us to deny all sin, and to live righteously, soberly, and *godly* in this present world^k."]

^g John xvi. 15.

^h Tit. ii. 14.

ⁱ Gal. ii. 17.

^k Tit. ii. 11, 12.

MMCCXXXI.

GODLINESS PROFITABLE UNTO ALL THINGS.

1 Tim. iv. 8, 9. *Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation.*

AS in the natural man there is a total alienation of heart from God, so, after that he has been in some measure awakened to a sense of his duty, there is in him a constant proneness to turn aside from God, and to rest in something short of a total surrender of the soul to him. This appears from the numerous

controversies which were agitated in the apostolic age. Christians even in that day were not contented with receiving the truth as it is in Jesus, but laboured to blend with it some favourite notions, either of Jewish superstition or Gentile philosophy; by means of which they drew away the minds of many from the simplicity of the Gospel, and from that practical regard to it which constitutes our highest duty. It is observable, too, that persons addicted to this habit always lay a very undue stress on their own peculiarities, and display more zeal in the propagation of them than in the diffusion of the Gospel itself. It is in reference to such practices that the Apostle is speaking in the words before us. He is cautioning Timothy against being led astray by them, or giving any countenance to them in his ministrations, which should rather be directed to the inculcating and enforcing of vital godliness: “Refuse profane and old wives’ fables,” says he; “and exercise thyself unto godliness: for bodily exercise, that is, a carnal attention to such things, profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come. *This (this character of godliness, as deserving and demanding our exclusive regards)* is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation.”

In confirmation of this saying, I will endeavour to shew,

I. The profitableness of true godliness—

“Godliness” here stands in opposition to all that superstitious or contentious men would place in its stead. It is to be understood as comprehending a surrender of ourselves to God, as his redeemed people, and a life of entire devotedness to his service. Now this is profitable,

1. In relation to the present life—

[What is it that has deluged the whole world with misery? What but sin? The world would still have been a paradise, if man had continued to retain his primitive holiness: and, so far as divine grace prevails to restore holiness to man, the world is again restored to its paradisiacal state of happiness. True it

is that the best of men are yet subject to wants, diseases, and death; so that how holy soever they may be, they must yet partake of the bitter consequences of sin. But the advantages enjoyed by the godly over all the rest of mankind are exceeding great.

First, The godly are *delivered from the dominion of evil passions*, which agitate all the rest of mankind.—See what the state of the world is by reason of pride, envy, malice, wrath, revenge: see what evils abound by reason of covetousness, ambition, lewdness, and selfishness, in ten thousand forms: mark the jealousies of rival kingdoms; the contentions in smaller societies; the feuds in families; and the workings of evil tempers in individuals: see how almost every human being has his life embittered by something inflicted by others, or brooding in his own bosom: and then say, Whether *he* has not the advantage, who has learned to “mortify his earthly members,” and to “crucify his flesh with its affections and lusts?”

Next, The godly are enabled to *live under the influence of love*:—and need I say what a source of comfort that is? Read the description of love as set forth in the 13th chapter of St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians, and judge, whether the exercise of such dispositions be not conducive to the happiness of the soul.

Again; The godly are *freed from numberless temptations*, into which the ungodly rush without restraint.—The ungodly, by their intercourse with each other, are walking, either in the midst of thorns and briers, where they constantly receive or inflict some painful wound; or, if their path be more pleasant, they only countenance each other in ways, which bring guilt upon their souls, and involve each other in irremediable ruin. The godly, on the contrary, by keeping at a distance from such snares, avoid the evils connected with them; and by their mutual intercourse promote the edification of each other in faith and love, in peace and holiness.

Add to all this, The godly *enjoy peace with God, and a blessed prospect beyond the grave*.—Oh! who can estimate this advantage? Who can tell what joy a sense of God’s pardoning love brings into the soul? Who can declare what the believer feels in his secret walk with God; in pouring out his soul before him, in apprehending and pleading God’s gracious promises, in surveying the fulness of righteousness and grace which is treasured up for him in Christ Jesus, in contemplating every event as ordered for his spiritual and eternal good, and in looking forward to an eternity of bliss in heaven? Who, I say, can calculate these advantages, which are the exclusive portion of the godly?

If it be said, that this description of the believer’s advantages

is not realized in fact, I grant that the generality of religious professors do not experience them to the extent that we have spoken of them. But why do they not experience them to this extent? Is it that they do not necessarily attach to vital godliness? No: but that godliness is but at a low ebb amongst those who profess to live under its influence. Were the professors of religion more like to the Apostles in vital godliness, they would, in the same proportion, be elevated above all the rest of the world, both in their character and enjoyments. They would indeed have their afflictions, as the Apostles had: but their "consolations should abound far *above* their afflictions," yea and even *by means of* their afflictions. And, as it is said that "godliness has *the promise* of all this," I will leave it all to rest upon that one saying, "If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him; and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him^a." Let the love of God the Father, and the in-dwelling of the Father and of Christ Jesus in the soul, be duly estimated, and we will leave any man in the universe to judge, whether godliness be not profitable as it respects this present life.]

2. In reference to the life to come—

[Of this there is so little doubt, that we need scarcely stop to confirm it, more especially as our further views of this subject demand a very peculiar attention. Let it only be recollected, that "to those who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, God has promised eternal life^b;" and that "they who overcome in this warfare shall sit down with Christ upon his throne, as he sitteth on his Father's throne^c:" and nothing more need be added to establish this obvious and acknowledged truth.]

Such being the profitableness of true godliness, we proceed to state,

II. The importance of it in that particular view—

Those who have not duly considered this subject would not have expected to find such a peculiar confirmation of it as the Apostle has added in our text. When, in a preceding chapter, he was about to declare the stupendous mystery, that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," he prefaced it with this declaration, that the truth he was about to utter was "a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation^d." *There* the importance and mysteriousness

^a John xiv. 23.

^b Rom. ii. 7. 1 John ii. 25.

^c Rev. iii. 21.

^d 1 Tim. i. 15.

of the truth easily account for the solemnity with which it is introduced: but where there is nothing affirmed but the profitableness of godliness, we seem to think so solemn a confirmation of it quite unnecessary. But we shall soon be of a different opinion, if we contemplate this truth in connexion with the subjects which both precede and follow it. We say then, that the profitableness of vital godliness ought to be regarded as a matter of primary and universal importance;

1. As tending to keep the mind from unprofitable speculations—

[The whole preceding context refers to speculations which either already existed in the Church, or should at a future period be introduced^e. Heretics and apostates were even then at work to spread their pernicious doctrines; those who were of Jewish origin “giving heed to fables and endless genealogies, which ministered questions rather than godly edifying that is in faith^f,” and those from among the Gentile converts obtruding upon the Church their “profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called^g.” The effect of these speculations was exceedingly pernicious: for whilst “conceited and ignorant men doted about such questions and strifes of words, they filled the Church with envy, and strife, and railings, and evil surmisings, and perverse disputings^h,” and eventually turned many from the faithⁱ.

Now in every age of the Church there are many, who, being themselves, through the subtilty of Satan, turned away from the simplicity of the Gospel, labour to propagate their own peculiar opinions, and to “draw away disciples after them.” Their views are often extremely specious, as were those of the Jews who sought to honour Moses^k, and those of the Gentiles who from a professed regard for the honour of Christ pleaded an exemption from obedience to the moral law^l. Frequently there is much truth mixed up with their errors; and their mistake lies not so much in what they would maintain, as in the undue importance which they attach to some points to the exclusion or neglect of others that are equally important. In a word, they, though “false apostles” in reality, are often so specious, that they appear like apostles of Christ himself^m.

^e ver. 1—3, 7.

^f 1 Tim. i. 4. and Tit. iii. 9.

^g 1 Tim. vi. 20.

^h 1 Tim. vi. 4, 5.

ⁱ 1 Tim. vi. 21.

^k Col. ii. 20—23.

^l Jude, ver. 4. 2 Pet. ii. 1, 17—19.

^m 2 Cor. xi. 3, 4, 13, 14.

How then are we to guard against such deceivers? I answer, By having our minds fully intent on practical and vital godliness. We shall see in a moment, that by suffering our minds to be turned into the channel of controversy, we shall lose much of that heavenliness of mind, that sweetness of temper, that expansion of love, and that singleness of eye, which are the brightest ornaments of our religion, and indispensably necessary to our true happiness. And what shall we gain to compensate for this loss? Nothing but a conceit of our own superior wisdom, and an uncharitable contempt or hatred of all who differ from us. This is the point which the Apostle labours so strenuously to impress upon our minds. "Refuse," says he, "all such exercises; for they are of little profit: but exercise thyself unto godliness," the profit of which can never be duly estimated. Keep habitually upon your minds a sense of the value of true godliness, and you will have no disposition for controversies, nor any satisfaction in the company of those who would obtrude their noxious sentiments upon you. You will act rather in conformity with the apostolic injunction, "From such withdraw thyselfⁿ."]

2. As sustaining the mind under all the trials and difficulties that we may have to cope with—

[To this the Apostle refers, in the words following my text. Exercise yourselves, says he, in this, which will be so profitable to your souls; "FOR" from my own experience I can declare, what support you will find from such conduct, in all the trials that you may be called to endure: "FOR therefore we both labour (gladly), and suffer reproach (cheerfully), because" we are upheld by a consciousness that we are living entirely *upon* God, and *for* God^o. That the lovers of subtle questions and curious disputations have a zeal, we acknowledge; and that they will often make sacrifices in defence of their tenets, we acknowledge: but in self-denying labours, and patient sufferings for the honour of God and the welfare of mankind, their exertions are paralysed. Their minds become contracted; and they are altogether occupied in maintaining their peculiar notions, and in gaining proselytes to their own party. Not so the persons who steadily labour for the attainment of vital godliness. They have their hearts more and more enlarged with love both to God and man. They feel so rich a recompence sweetly and continually flowing into their souls, that they only regret they cannot do a thousand times more for God, and that they should ever experience any thing but unqualified delight in what they suffer for him^p. They

ⁿ 1 Tim. vi. 5.

^o ver. 10.

^p 2 Cor. xii. 10. "*We take pleasure,*" &c.

will “forget all that is behind, and press forward to that which is before;” like persons in a race, who have no desire but to fulfil the will of God, and to “finish their course with joy.” In this respect then, no less than in the former, is godliness truly profitable; and that it is so, “is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance.”]

Let me then, in this view of the subject, ENTREAT you all,

1. To esteem godliness according to its true character—

[The greater part of mankind deny the necessity of it even to their eternal welfare: and, if you justify your zeal by a reference to the future judgment, they will not hesitate to affirm, that such exertions are not necessary to the salvation of the soul, and that to abound in them is to be “righteous over-much.” Then, as to the present life, almost all will maintain, that such godliness as the Gospel requires will be subversive of our interests and our happiness in the world; and from those considerations will urge us to lay aside what they call our needless peculiarities. But be assured, that there is no real happiness even in this world, and much less in the world to come, but through an entire devotion of the soul to God. Let no man deceive you in relation to this matter; for “it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance.” The whole Scripture, from the beginning to the end, bears testimony to this truth, that God’s service is perfect freedom, and that religion’s “ways are ways of pleasantness and peace.” If it be said, that piety will involve us in trouble, for that “all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution;” we reply, It is true: but nevertheless the consolations of the godly shall infinitely over-balance their afflictions; nor are “the sufferings of this present life worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us^q.” Let this then be a fixed principle in all your hearts, that “the fear of the Lord, *that* is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.”]

2. To seek it according to its real worth—

[The word which we translate, “*exercise* thyself” unto godliness, is taken from the Grecian games, in which those who engaged stripped themselves of all unnecessary clothing, in order that they might be able to exert themselves with more effect^r. Now in this manner should we address ourselves to the work of religion. We should feel that the utmost possible exertions are necessary for the attaining of such a measure of it as will secure the prize. We should cast off every thing

^q Rom. viii. 18.

^r γύμναζε σεαυτὸν, ver. 7.

that may impede our progress in it; and determinately engage in it as those who will at least take care not to lose the prize through any fault or negligence of their own. You well know how those who were to contend in the Olympic games denied themselves, and by what a long course of training they endeavoured to fit themselves for their respective contests. O, brethren, enter thus into the prosecution of true piety, “avoiding all foolish questions as unprofitable and vain^s,” and keeping your eye steadily fixed on the attainment of the Divine image in your soul: then will you “grow up into Christ in all things as your living Head,” and then will you find that “you will not labour in vain or run in vain.”]

^s Tit. iii. 9.

MMCCXXXII.

ADDRESS TO YOUNG PERSONS.

1 Tim. iv. 12. *Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*

TO be earnestly engaged in advancing the welfare of our own souls, is doubtless our first concern. But we should consider, also, how far our conduct may affect the souls of others; and should endeavour so to demean ourselves, that we may prove stumbling-blocks to none, but helpers to all. Of course, those who are engaged in the ministerial office, inasmuch as their conduct is more noticed than that of others, and their influence consequently more extensive, are peculiarly bound to walk with all possible circumspection, “giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed.” But the same care is requisite in all: and the exhortation addressed by St. Paul to Timothy may with great propriety be addressed to all young persons professing godliness: “Let no man despise your youth; but be examples to all around you, and in every thing that is good.” To such, therefore, would I apply the Apostle’s directions, which may be regarded as delivered,

I. In a way of caution—

It is certain that young persons are liable to err—

[Their knowledge is contracted, in comparison of what it most probably will be at a more advanced period of life: and consequently their judgment cannot yet have been matured. Their experience too must, of necessity, have been small; so that, as yet, they do not exactly see what will be the probable result of any line of conduct upon the world around them. They are apt also to take but a partial view of things, and to be actuated more by feeling than by sound judgment; and to be more anxious about what relates to their present real or supposed interests, than about what shall eventually prove most beneficial to themselves and others. Hence, as may reasonably be expected, they do not always approve themselves to the judgment of those who are more considerate and wise.]

It must also be acknowledged, that there is amongst those who are more advanced in life, a proneness to condemn what is done by their younger brethren, especially what is done by them under the influence of religion—

[Persons of maturer years have no conception that the young and inexperienced should have juster views of things than themselves: and they judge it to be presumptuous in the young and arrogant to depart from the line prescribed and followed by their elders. To see persons just entering into life averse to pleasures which their fathers have so long pursued, and observant of duties which their fathers have altogether disregarded, is very offensive to the world; who are thus reduced to a necessity, of either acknowledging their own ways to be evil, or of condemning the ways of their younger brethren as fanatical and absurd. Which alternative they will prefer is obvious enough: and therefore it is always found, that the piety of young persons is a matter of offence to their ungodly superiors. “To the natural man, universally the things of the Spirit are foolishness^a,” even though they be found in persons of the most mature age and of the soundest discretion: much more, therefore, are they so reputed, when found in persons who possess not the advantages attached to age and experience: and, consequently, those who profess religion in early life must expect to be sneered at and despised by those whose habits are unfriendly to religion, and who “hate the light, because it reproves their evil deeds.”]

But from hence arises a necessity for peculiar care on the part of young persons, that “no man may have occasion to despise their youth”—

^a 1 Cor. ii. 14.

[It will be well for young persons to bear in mind the two points which we have just adverted to; namely, their own liability to err, and the proneness of their seniors to judge them harshly. To obviate both these evils, the greatest circumspection is necessary: nor can I give any better rule to the young than to exchange places with their seniors; and to consider, on every particular occasion, what judgment they themselves would form in a change of circumstances. I know, indeed, and they also should know, that “God alone can give them a right judgment in any thing^b.” But multitudes deceive themselves, whilst in praying to God for direction, they are yet following blindly the way of their own hearts. To obtain a right direction, the mind must be divested of every undue bias: and this will be effected by nothing better than the plan which I have just suggested.

It is highly desirable, also, that young persons be on their guard against raising matters of trifling consideration into an undue importance, and laying a stress on them, as though they were of vital interest to the soul. This is too much the habit of youth and inexperience; and it affords but too just an occasion for their seniors to complain of them, as ignorant, and wilful, and pertinacious, and absurd.

Let it be remembered then, that if piety spread the sails, wisdom should be at the helm; and that the determination of all, and of young persons in particular, should be in unison with that of David: “I will behave myself wisely before thee in a perfect way^c.” Every thing that is extravagant should be avoided. Times and circumstances should be taken into the account. The manner of doing every thing should also be an object of attention. In a word, it should never be forgotten, that we are in the midst of enemies, who will be glad to cast blame upon us; and that our wisdom is, so to conduct ourselves, that “they who are on the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of us^d.”]

But, with the Apostle, let us prosecute the same idea,

II. In a way of encouragement—

Young people are condemned for not keeping their religion to themselves. But they are not to put their light under a bushel: on the contrary, they are, as much as they ever will be at any future period of their lives, bound to “let their light so shine before men, that all who behold it may be constrained to

^b 2 Tim. ii. 7.

^c Ps. ci. 2.

^d Tit. ii. 8. See also 1 Pet. iii. 16.

glorify their Father who is in heaven^e." There is no eminence to which it is not their duty and their privilege, to attain. And, if Timothy, at his early age, was to be "an example," not to the world only, but "to believers" also; so should every young person endeavour to be, in the place and station where God has appointed him to move.

Let every one of you, then, be an example even to believers,

1. In word—

[The statements of Timothy were to be made in perfect accordance with God's revealed will: and so should yours be also. Your adversaries will be glad to take advantage of any thing that is unsound in your sentiments; and, in order to find occasion against you, they will be urging you upon difficult questions, and on matters of doubtful disputation. But, in all your intercourse with them, I would advise you to take your stand on ground that is utterly unassailable. That to seek the salvation which God offers us in the Gospel, is of indispensable moment to every child of man; and that so to live, as, at the hour of death, we shall wish we had lived, is the part of sound wisdom. *These*, and such like topics, I should recommend to the *young* when conversing with their *seniors* who are of an adverse mind: it will be time enough to enter into deeper subjects, when the ears of persons are open to hear, and their hearts are also open to receive, the truths which you may be able to lay before them. To spread pearls before persons who are disposed only to trample them under their feet, is at all times inexpedient and unwise: and even when young persons do make fuller statements of their views, they should do it with modesty, and caution, and moderation.]

2. In conversation—

[The whole of a young person's deportment, too, should be such as becomes the Gospel of Christ. Every thing of levity and folly should be put away, and nothing admitted but what is consistent with "sound wisdom and discretion" — — —]

3. In charity—

[Nothing should be said or done that is contrary to "love." Whether in judging others, or in acting towards them, we should breathe nothing but love. True it is, that the treatment which persons in the exercise of early piety are likely to receive, is calculated to generate somewhat of resentment in their minds: but they must be much on their guard

^e Matt. v. 16.

to “render nothing but good for evil,” until they shall have “overcome the evil with their good^f.”]

4. In spirit—

[There is a peculiar need for young persons to guard against every thing of conceit and forwardness, and every disposition that is contrary either to humility or love. Who does not admire modesty, and gentleness, and kindness, and all similar graces, which combine to render a person amiable? Let those graces then be ever cultivated, and ever in exercise, so that you may ever be seen “clothed with humility.” *This* will do much to recommend religion: and this will render you worthy of imitation by all who behold you.]

5. In faith—

[There is in young persons too great a readiness to yield to discouragement, and to rely on an arm of flesh in times of more than ordinary trial. But you must look to God with all simplicity of mind, and confide in him, as engaged to make “all things work together for your good.” Never must you stagger at any promise through unbelief; but be strong in faith, giving glory to God.”]

6. In purity—

[The very regard which is first created by sympathy and concord on the subjects of religion, may, if not watched, degenerate into feelings of a less hallowed kind; and especially at a period of life when the passions are strong, and a want of experience may put us off our guard. Every word and every look, yea, and every thought, ought to be well-guarded, in order that Satan may not take advantage of us, and that not even the breath of scandal may be raised against us.

In a word, the counsel given to Titus is that which every one of us should follow: “Young men exhort to be sober-minded; in all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works^g.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are inclined to take offence at religion or its professors—

[There is an extreme unreasonableness in many, who expect, that the very instant a person becomes religiously inclined, he shall be freed at once from every infirmity incident to our fallen nature; and however young he may be, he shall become at once as wise and judicious as the most experienced Christian. But wisdom is not so soon attained; nor are the corruptions of our nature subdued without many severe

^f Rom. xii. 21.

^g Tit. ii. 6, 7.

conflicts, and many humiliating falls: and the fair way to judge any man, is, to inquire what he would have been without religion, and then to compare that with what he is as professing godliness. I may go further, and say, that even *that* is scarcely a fair criterion; because he is, by means of his new dispositions, brought into circumstances so entirely new, as that no part of his former experience will avail him for the direction of his conduct: and, inasmuch as the considerations of religion infinitely outweigh all others that can operate upon his mind, it is no wonder if they sometimes divert his attention from matters of subordinate importance, which yet ought to be noticed by him in order to a perfect regulation of his conduct.

But, if it be unreasonable for men to “despise the youth” of a religious professor, it is still more unreasonable to despise religion itself on account of the faults of those who profess it. Religion itself is the same, whatever be the conduct of its advocates; and it enjoins nothing but what is holy and just and good: and as well might a man despise the sun because of the exhalations of a dunghill, as despise religion on account of any thing which it may draw forth from the infirmities of our fallen nature. If we received it aright, and improved it as we ought, it would uniformly and universally assimilate us to our God.

Let candour then be exercised towards religion and its adherents. Let each stand or fall by their own merits. If those who profess religion walk unworthy of it, let them be condemned: but let not religion be condemned for their sake. And before they be finally condemned, let that allowance be made for them, which would be made for others of the same age, and similarly circumstanced. And if this candour be exercised, we fear not but that religion itself shall stand approved; and we trust, that the prejudices which exist against it shall be greatly diminished, if not utterly destroyed.]

2. Those who would recommend religion—

[Certainly, it is of vast importance that the professors of religion should adorn it, and walk worthy of it. To those who would approve themselves to God in this respect, I would say, remember how much the welfare of your fellow-creatures, yea, and the honour of your God too, depend on you. Be not hasty in your decisions, nor over-confident that you are right. Be willing to be advised by those of whose wisdom and piety you have reason to hope well. And be careful not to plead one duty as a reason and ground for the neglect of another. Sins and lusts may counteract each other; but graces and duties are, for the most part, harmonious: and if, in any case, you be compelled, for conscience sake, to refuse to man the submission he demands, let it be clear that you act from conscience

only, and not from wilfulness: and be ready, not only with meekness and fear to assign your reasons for your conduct, but to submit those reasons to the test of sound wisdom and of real piety. In a word, endeavour “by your good and blameless conversation to win those” who would not listen to God’s revealed will: so shall you prove blessings to those around you; and bring glory to that God, in whom you trust, and whom you profess to serve.]

MMCCXXXIII.

THE QUALITY OF MEN’S WORKS DISCOVERED IN THE DAY OF JUDGMENT.

1 Tim. v. 24, 25. *Some men’s sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after. Likewise also the good works of some are manifest beforehand; and they that are otherwise cannot be hid.*

AN attention to the context is of the greatest importance in explaining the Holy Scriptures: for there is not any error into which we may not run, if we overlook the connexion in which every different expression stands. Yet it is possible to err even on that side: for the inspired writers are not so fettered, but that they sometimes pass from one subject to another without any connexion except what existed in their own minds, and sometimes with an easy, though not a logical, transition. Many able Commentators, through an excessive attention to the context, would limit the words before us to the admission of persons to the ministerial office, of which the Apostle is speaking in the foregoing verses. But I am persuaded, that they ought not to be so limited. They arise indeed from that subject; but they carry the mind beyond it; and were intended to encourage Timothy to execute with fidelity the trust reposed in him: he must “not lay hands suddenly on any, lest he become a partaker of their sins:” but if, after all his care, he should be deceived, he shall not be deemed guilty on that account, since God alone can see the heart: and the mistakes which are made respecting the characters of men in this life, shall all be rectified in the life to come.

Taking the words in this sense, they will be found to express *the very same idea*, and in *the very same connexion*, which *the same Apostle* has suggested in other places ; to which, in the progress of our subject, we shall have occasion to refer^a.

Fully persuaded in my own mind that the words do ultimately refer to the day of judgment, I shall proceed,

I. To mark the truths which are here declared—

These relate to all the different works of men ;—to,

1. Their evil works—

[Many sins are so flagrant, that, as they render a person manifestly unfit for admission to the ministerial office^b, so they leave no doubt respecting the judgment which will be passed upon him in the last day. Nor do we include in this number those only which are of the grosser kind, and which are stamped with infamy by even the better kind of heathens, (such as fornication and adultery,) but those also which, though they bring with them no stigma in the estimation of mankind, are decidedly reprobated by the word of God. Amongst the foremost of these we must mention a *worldly spirit*, which as decidedly proves a person to be destitute of true religion as any other sin whatever : for to serve God and Mammon too is impossible^c. The true disciple of Christ is no more of the world than his Lord and Master was^d. A *disregard of the Gospel* too is another of those sins which will infallibly bring condemnation upon the soul : for “ if judgment begin, as it surely will, at the house of God, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God^e ? ” How is it possible that any should “ escape, who neglect so great salvation^f ? ” We might mention a variety of other sins, which, though they are accounted

^a 1 Cor. iii. 9—15. and iv. 2—5. In both of these places the Apostle is speaking of the ministry of the word : in the former, he refers to the day of judgment as determining the quality of the fruits produced by it ; and in the latter, as deciding upon his character as to fidelity in the discharge of his ministerial office. Indeed so intimate was the connexion between the ministerial office and the day of judgment in his mind, that he scarcely ever mentions the one without referring to the other.

^b The reader will observe, that the more limited sense of the words is not lost sight of, though the more enlarged sense is decidedly preferred.

^c Matt. vi. 24.

^d John xvii. 14, 16.

^e 1 Pet. iv. 17.

^f Heb. ii. 3.

light and venial by the ungodly world, stamp the character so clearly and manifestly, that no one who believes the Scriptures can doubt one moment what the issue of them will be in the day of judgment^g.

But whilst these “go before to judgment,” others of a more secret and dubious nature “follow after.” There are many sins in the heart, which, though harboured and indulged there, escape the eye of men, and are known to God alone. It is no uncommon thing for men to stand well both in their own eyes and in the estimation of others, and yet to be hateful in the sight of the heart-searching God. Their works may externally be good, and yet not be perfect before God^h. Men may “have a name to live, and yet in reality be deadⁱ.” They may have much religion in appearance, and yet “all their religion be vain^k.” But it is not till the day of judgment that their real character will be known : and, when disclosed by God, and visited with merited displeasure, it will cause the utmost surprise in all who once knew and admired them upon earth^l. Then, if not before, “their sin will find them out.”]

2. Their good works—

[Some men are so eminently holy, that no one could hesitate to pronounce them fit to be employed in the sacred ministry of the Gospel : nor can any one doubt respecting the safety of their state when they die. It is said of mariners, that, though the most experienced may sometimes mistake a cloud for land, the most inexperienced never mistakes land for a cloud ; there being in the land something which carries its own evidence along with it. Thus vital godliness, when exhibited in bright colours, and in an uniform consistent tenour, commends itself to all who behold it : it is a light, which needs nothing else to testify of it, or to set it forth : its own effulgence is the most convincing evidence of its existence. The ultimate happiness of those who possess it, is foreseen with an assured confidence by all who mark its course.

But there are some whose piety, in consequence of the slenderness of their attainments, or the privacy of their situation, or the insuperable diffidence and reserve of their minds, is concealed from public view. External circumstances too may sometimes occasion the light, though real, to be obscured ; as was the case with those “seven thousand men in Israel,” who, though unknown to the Prophet Elijah, had never bowed

^g 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. Gal. v. 19—21.

^h 2 Chron. xxv. 2. Luke viii. 14.

ⁱ Rev. iii. 1—3.

^k Jam. i. 26.

^l Job xx. 5—7. What language can convey all the pathos that is implied in that expression, “Where is he ?”

their knee to the image of Baal. Indeed, it is of the nature of true religion to affect secrecy. The sighs, and groans, and prayers, and tears of the real penitent are poured forth in secret: and the consciousness of being seen or heard by any mortal man, would be sufficient to stifle all. The inward affiance of the soul too is unknown to any but God; as indeed are also all the sublimest workings of the affections towards God. None but "He who searches the heart and tries the reins" can discern that entireness of heart which constitutes a man "an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile." But God does see, yea, and mark also, those more secret and refined exercises of the soul, which are hid from all besides. It is not for those only who speak often one to another that God records his approbation in the book of his remembrance, but for those also who in modest silence "*think* upon his name^m:" and though those thoughts were altogether hidden from their earthly friends, he will bring them forth at the last day as evidences in favour of those who fostered them in their bosoms, and will recompense them with testimonies of his warmest approbationⁿ. "The hidden man of the heart" is that which constitutes our brightest ornament in this world^o, and which most insures his plaudit in the world to come.]

Such being the truths contained in our text, we go on,

II. To deduce from them some important observations—

In the view of the future judgment,

1. We should diligently acquaint ourselves with God's rule of judgment—

[The written word of God is the rule of our conduct: and it is that also by which we shall be tried in the last day. We are told, that "in that day, when the judgment is set, the books shall be opened^p," for the express purpose "that all may be judged out of them;" and though there may be various other books, as the book of providence, the book of conscience, and the book of life, yet we are sure that the book of the Scriptures must be one. Now that book changeth not, nor accommodates itself to the wishes of any: and it is in vain for us to complain of it as too strict, or to say respecting any thing in it, "This is an hard saying; who can hear it?" It is in vain to reduce its demands to any standard of our own. Whatever we or the whole world may say, God's requirements

^m Mal. iii. 16.

^o 1 Pet. iii. 4.

ⁿ Rev. xiv. 13. "Their works do follow them."

^p Dan. vii. 10. Rev. xx. 12.

will be the same, and his judgment will be in perfect correspondence with them. We should not therefore be inquiring, What the opinions of men are in relation to these things, but What God speaks in his word. We should study that word with care: we should bring ourselves to it as a touchstone^a: we should pray over it, with an earnest desire to understand its true import, and with a full determination of heart, through grace, to follow it in every particular. We should beg of God to “write his law in our hearts,” and to “cast our souls, as it were, into the very mould of his Gospel:” for, when “truth exists in our inward parts,” we need not fear but that “the Lord, the righteous Judge, will confer upon us a crown of righteousness in the great day of his appearing^t.”]

2. We should contentedly refer ourselves to his judgment—

[Let our conduct be ever so pure, and ever so wise, it will not be possible for us to escape the reproaches of an ungodly world. Even those who profess godliness are not always candid in their judgment: on the contrary, they are very apt to put an unkind construction on the conduct of others, especially when it militates in any degree against their wishes or interests. Who would have thought that even the Apostle Paul should be traduced as a time-serving man, whose views, and aims, and habits, were altogether carnal? Yet thus was he judged, even by many who professed a great zeal for religion^s. Who then can hope to escape the censures of men? Who can hope so to walk as never to be misrepresented by those who see his actions only, but are unacquainted with his motives and principles? It may be that even the heaviest charges may be brought against us without any foundation; and that we may be persecuted, as David was by Saul, with unrelenting fury, when our conduct has been as discreet and blameless as the most consummate piety could inspire. Well, if such be our lot, let it not weigh too heavily on our minds: let us say with Paul, “It is a small matter with me to be judged of man’s judgment;” for God will, ere long, “bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart; and then shall every man” who has deserved it, “have praise of God^t.” The expression here in the original is remarkable; “It is a small matter to be judged of man’s *day*.” Man has *his day*: but God has *his* also. And man’s day consists of but a few hours: but God’s shall endure for ever. Therefore we may well commit our cause to God without anxiety, and wait with patience the time of his coming, when

^a John iii. 21.

^s 2 Cor. x. 2.

^r 2 Tim. iv. 8.

^t 1 Cor. iv. 3, 5.

“he will bring forth our righteousness as the light, and our judgment as the noon-day.”]

3. We should however be jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy—

[As our conduct may be misrepresented by others, so may it also be misjudged by ourselves. Self-love is very apt to blind us, and to make us form a favourable opinion of ourselves, when we are in reality widely deviating from the path of duty. How little did the Apostles imagine that they were actuated by a sinful principle, when they would have called fire from heaven to consume a Samaritan village! They gave themselves credit for a holy zeal, whilst they were altogether under the influence of pride and revenge. And what our blessed Lord said to them, is but too applicable on many occasions to ourselves, “Ye know not what spirit ye are of.” We should bear in mind that we are partial judges in every thing that relates to ourselves; and that excessive confidence of our own innocence is replete with danger, not only as preventing a careful self-examination, but as creating in us an unhallowed boldness before God: for “not he that commendeth himself shall be ultimately approved, but he whom the Lord commendeth^u.” The Apostle Paul himself, though he was unconscious of any thing amiss within him, would not venture too confidently to assert his innocence; but commended himself to the judgment of the heart-searching God: “I know nothing by myself,” says he; “yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord^x.” Thus we also should cultivate within ourselves a holy fear, lest some hidden “evils, which went not before to judgment, should follow after,” and “find us out,” when they can neither be rectified nor forgiven. There is “a fire that shall try our every work:” and that only shall be *approved* which stands the test of that day^y.]

4. We should act to God in all that we do—

[It is in vain to act to man, or to seek the applause of man: for his judgment, whether favourable or unfavourable, will not affect our future state: the judgment of the whole world will not influence our Judge: he will “judge righteous judgment;” and either acquit or condemn, according as we are found conformed to him in holiness, or destitute of his blessed image. Man’s rule of duty is so defective, that we shall greatly err, if we satisfy ourselves with that: yea, it is in the most essential matters so erroneous, that “if we seek to please men, we cannot be the servants of Jesus Christ^z.” Our great

^u 2 Cor. x. 18.

^x 1 Cor. iv. 4.

^y 1 Cor. iii. 13—15.

^z Gal. i. 10.

object must be, to approve ourselves to God; and then we need not be much concerned whether our actions be followed by an "evil or good report" from the partial judges that are around us. I mean not by this that we should be inattentive to the opinions of men, or that we should disregard their censures: for, as far as we possibly can, "we should provide things honest in the sight of all men:" but it is God's word only that we should take as the rule of our conduct, and him alone whom we should strive to please: and, if men be not satisfied with us for serving God according to his written word, we must be content to suffer obloquy from them, and determine to "obey God rather than man." However we may be "judged according to men in the flesh," we need fear nothing, if "we live according to God in the spirit^a." We shall "enjoy the testimony of a good conscience," as Hezekiah did^b, "and have confidence before God now, and not be ashamed before him at his coming^c."]

^a 1 Pet. iv. 6.^b 2 Cor. i. 12. 2 Kings xx. 3.^c 1 John ii. 28. and iii. 19—21.

MMCCXXXIV.

THE GOSPEL PRODUCTIVE OF GOOD WORKS.

1 Tim. vi. 3. *The doctrine which is according to godliness.*

THE objections which men urge against the doctrines of the Gospel, originate for the most part in their aversion to its precepts. The restraint which it imposes on their actions is irksome to them. They wish to follow the impulse of their passions, or the dictates of self-interest: and when they are checked in their progress, they complain, that the path marked out for them is too strait, and the yoke which we would put upon them is too heavy.

St. Paul is giving directions for the conduct of masters and servants towards each other: but, however "wholesome his words" were, he foresaw that some would "not consent to" them, notwithstanding they were "the words of Christ himself," and in perfect unison with the Gospel, which was, in that, as well as in every other respect, "a doctrine according to godliness." He then proceeds to animadvert upon such characters, and to shew, that their dislike to the

injunctions given them was owing only to their own pride, and ignorance, and love of sin.

The expression contained in the text is peculiarly worthy of our attention. It gives a just, and very important view of the Gospel; to illustrate and confirm which is the intent of this discourse.

In order to prove that the Gospel is indeed “a doctrine according to godliness,” let us consult,

I. Its doctrines—

We might, if our time would admit of it, illustrate this in every one of the doctrines of our holy religion. But we shall confine ourselves to,

1. The representations which it gives us of God—

[The systems of religion which obtained among the heathen, were calculated rather to promote, than to repress, iniquity: for even their gods themselves, according to their own representation of them, were monsters of iniquity. But our God is holy and just; so holy, that he cannot look upon sin without the utmost abhorrence of it^a; and so just, that he will never suffer it to pass unpunished^b.

If indeed these were his only attributes, men might sit down in despair, and take their fill of sin, because they would have no encouragement to depart from it. But “there is mercy also with him, that he may be feared;” yea, so “rich is he in mercy,” that “none shall ever seek his face in vain.”

How must the contemplation of such perfections tend to deter men from the commission of evil, and to foster in them every holy sentiment and desire!]

2. The means which it prescribes for our reconciliation with him—

[The leading feature of the Gospel is, that it proclaims pardon to penitent sinners, through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let any one reflect on this stupendous mystery, the incarnation and death of the Son of God; let him consider, that no less a sacrifice than that made by our incarnate God was sufficient to atone for sin; and will he then be willing to incur all the penalties of sin, and to bear them in his own person? Will not the tears and agonies of an expiring Saviour compel him to exclaim, “If such things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?” and will not the love of Christ in submitting to such an ignominious death, on purpose that

^a Hab. i. 13.

^b Exod. xxxiv. 7.

he might redeem him from iniquity, have any influence on his mind? Will he readily trample on the blood that was shed for him, and crucify his Lord afresh by continuing in sin?]

Let us prosecute the same inquiry, in relation to,

II. Its precepts—

View the precepts relating to God and our neighbour—

[The two great commandments of the law are confirmed and ratified by the Gospel, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself.” Now can any man love God, and not endeavour to do his will? Or, if he make his own self-love the rule and measure of his love to others, can he willingly injure them in any thing, or forbear to do them good? Would not an unfeigned love to these commands lay the axe to the root of all sin, and transform men into the very image of their God?]

View the directions which it gives for self-government—

[The Gospel does not regulate the actions only, but the heart: it extends its dominion over all the most secret motives and inclinations; and requires every thought to be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. It makes no allowance for temptations, as though they extenuated the guilt of sin, or were an excuse for the commission of iniquity; but teaches us to “heap coals of fire on the head of an enemy” by acts of kindness, and “not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good.” It tolerates no kind or degree of sin, but enjoins us to “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God.” It requires us to “be holy as God himself is holy,” and “perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

Can any one that considers these precepts, doubt what is the nature and tendency of the Gospel?]

Let us examine further,

III. Its examples—

It calls us to an imitation of,

1. Our blessed Lord—

[He was virtue itself embodied. Neither friends nor enemies could ever find in him the smallest spot or blemish. Under circumstances the most trying that can be imagined, he preserved the same serenity of mind, the same meek and heavenly disposition. While he was suffering the most injurious treatment, he was like a lamb led to the slaughter:

and in the very agonies of death, he prayed for nothing but blessings on the head of his cruel murderers. Now we are told, that in all this “he set us an example, that we should follow his steps:” and that all his followers must “walk even as he walked.”]

2. His holy Apostles—

[These were far inferior indeed to their Divine Master; yet were they bright patterns of every thing that was excellent and praise-worthy. As being men of like passions with us, they manifested on some occasions their infirmities: and, in these instances, they are warnings to us, and not examples. But, for the most part, they conducted themselves in a way that excites our highest admiration. And though on account of their defects we cannot follow them in every thing, yet we are called on the whole to tread in their steps, and to “be followers of them, as they were of Christ.”]

Are not these sufficient proofs of the holy tendency of the Gospel?]

INFER—

1. How little reason is there for objecting to the Gospel as unfriendly to morality!

[Men ground this objection upon the doctrine of our being “justified by faith only, without the works of the law.” But if they would consider that that faith is always preceded by repentance, and followed by obedience, they would see that there was no foundation at all for their objection. If we said that people might live and die in an impenitent and disobedient state, and yet be saved by their faith, then there were good reason to condemn the Gospel which we preach: but while we maintain the character of God as it is exhibited in the Gospel, together with the obligation of its precepts, and the purity of its examples, no man need to tremble for the ark of God. A roof is not the less necessary to a house, because it is not to be laid as a foundation: nor are works less necessary, because they cannot justify us before God. Let them but stand in their proper place, and they are as necessary as faith itself.]

2. How deluded are they who hold the truth in unrighteousness!

[There doubtless are many who profess to believe in Christ, while yet by their works they utterly deny him. There was one of this description even in the family of Christ himself. But will the faith which they exercise be sufficient to save them? No: their faith is dead, being alone: it is no better than the faith of devils: nor will it be productive of any

benefit to their souls: yea rather, inasmuch as it argued light and knowledge, it will only enhance their guilt, and aggravate their condemnation. Let those who are not occupied in a careful imitation of their Lord, and an unreserved obedience to his will, know assuredly, that if, on the one hand, he that believeth shall be saved, so, on the other hand, "the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven."]

3. How great are the obligations of God's people to walk circumspectly!

[The world will judge of the Gospel, not so much by what they hear, as by what they see. Now, though they have no right to act thus, we should be careful not to lay a stumbling-block before them. We should endeavour rather to make a good impression on their minds, and to give them no occasion from our conduct to speak evil of the truth itself. We should shew them by our lives, that their fears respecting the licentious tendency of the Gospel are groundless. By walking as it becometh saints, we should put to silence their ignorant objections, and constrain them to confess, that, however the Gospel may be dishonoured by its friends, or calumniated by its enemies, it is indeed a doctrine according to godliness.]

MMCCXXXV.

GODLINESS WITH CONTENTMENT.

1 Tim. vi. 6. *Godliness with contentment is great gain.*

TO the great dishonour of Christianity, there are many professors, and even preachers of it, who are more intent on promoting their own temporal interests, or the interests of their party, than on advancing practical religion in the world. Of such persons St. Paul is speaking in the context: and he enjoins Timothy to withdraw himself from them, as from persons who disgraced the Christian name, by giving reason to people to conclude, that "they supposed gain to be godliness." In opposition to such characters, the Apostle reverses that which he had stated as their opinion; and declares, that though gain was not godliness, godliness was gain, yea, and "great gain," if it were joined "with contentment."

In vindication of this sentiment, we shall shew,

I. What we are to understand by “godliness”—

The frame of mind which we may conceive the angels to enjoy, would be by no means suited to our state: we are sinners, redeemed sinners; and therefore “godliness” must include such a frame of mind as becomes persons in our condition. In this view, it implies,

1. An affiance in God through Christ—

[This is the foundation of all true religion. Whatever a man may possess without this, he has not one particle of real godliness. If we could suppose him to be as just and honest, as kind and amiable, yea, as devout and fervent, as ever man was, still, if he had not the heart of a sinner, of a sinner justly condemned, and delivered from condemnation solely by the blood of Christ, he would be utterly destitute of true religion — — —]

2. A devotedness to God in Christ—

[This must spring from the former: for though faith and practice differ from each other, as much as the root of a tree does from the fruit it bears, yet we must by no means separate them, since they are equally essential to real godliness. A reformation of the external conduct, or a partial surrender of the heart to God, will not suffice: if we would be approved by God, we must have “our whole selves, body, soul, and spirit, sanctified” to his service — — — And as Christ is the only mediator through whom we approach to God, so must Christ, that is, God in Christ, be our only Lord and Governor.]

When we have just views of the nature of godliness, we shall see,

II. Its connexion with contentment—

Such godliness as has been described must bring contentment along with it, since all who possess it must feel,

1. A consciousness that they deserve the miseries of hell—

[No person can have an entire affiance in God through Christ, till he have felt his desert of God’s wrath and indignation. And can such a person be discontented with any lot that may be assigned him? Must he not, even in the most afflicted situation, say, “Shall a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?” Will he not call every

affliction light, yea, lightness itself, in comparison of the misery he deserves? Will he not, under the pressure of the heaviest calamities, thank God that he is not in hell?]

2. A sense of infinite obligation to God for mercies received—

[One who has within him the constituents of real godliness, must see himself to be infinitely indebted to God for the gift of his dear Son, for the knowledge of salvation by him, and for the prospect of everlasting glory. His sense of these mercies cannot but be heightened also by the consideration, that they were never once offered to the fallen angels, nor accepted by the great majority of those to whom they have been offered. Can such an one repine that he has a less measure of health, or riches, or temporal conveniences than others, when he is so far exalted above them in things of infinitely greater moment?]

3. A willingness to be conformed to the image of Christ—

[No true disciple of Christ expects or wishes to be in a state different from that which his Lord and Master experienced when on earth. But what was the condition of Jesus in the world? Did he live in ease and affluence and honour? No; “he was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” He subsisted oftentimes on the benevolence of his friends and followers; and often had not so much as “a place where to lay his head.” Who that reflects on this, will murmur at his lot, even though nothing but poverty and persecution should await him? Will he not check the first risings of discontent with this obvious reflection, “The disciple cannot be above his Lord: it is sufficient for the disciple that he be as his Lord?”]

The connexion of godliness with contentment being thus plain, let us consider,

III. The advantage of it as so connected—

St. Paul tells us, that “godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.” Let us view it then,

1. In reference to this life—

[Money has obtained the exclusive title of “gain:” but godliness has an incomparably greater right to that appellation. There are three principal ends for which money is considered as valuable; namely, to provide present gratifications, to secure against future troubles, and to benefit our children or dependents.

But in these respects it cannot for one moment stand in competition with godliness,—that godliness I mean which is connected with contentment. Suppose money to afford ever such high gratifications, (though it is very much overrated by the generality,) will not pardon of sin, peace of conscience, and the enjoyment of the Divine presence, far outweigh them all? Suppose money to afford effectual relief in trouble, (though it cannot assuage our pain either of mind or body,) what consolations can it afford equal to those which result from godliness and contentment? The utmost that money can do, is to procure some outward relief; whereas the piety above described will convert every cross into a comfort, and every trouble into a fountain of joy. We are ready to acknowledge that money has its uses, and very important uses too, in reference to our children or dependents, (though it not unfrequently is a curse to them rather than a benefit,) yet even in this view is it far inferior to religion: for the godly and contented man will instruct his children and dependents in those principles which he has found so beneficial to himself: and who can duly estimate the benefit of such instructions, confirmed and enforced by such an example? Who can value sufficiently the intercessions of such a friend? Suppose a dying man to address his surviving relatives, ‘I have not wealth laid up for you in my coffers, but I have thousands of prayers treasured up for you in heaven, which, I trust, will come down in blessings on your heads, when I lie mouldering in the dust: I have engaged my God to be the Husband of the widow, and the Father of the fatherless; yes, my dear wife and children, I have entreated *him* to take care of you; and I believe that my prayers have not gone forth in vain.’ I say, such a legacy would be far better than thousands of silver and gold.

Thus in every view for which money is coveted, godliness with contentment is a richer portion.]

2. In reference to the world to come—

[The blindest worldling in the universe is not foolish enough to think that “riches will profit him in the day of wrath.” In the words following the text this point is established beyond all contradiction; “For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out.” Here therefore all competition ceases; and “gain” must be confessed to belong exclusively to the godly and contented mind.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who boast of contentment, while they are destitute of godliness—

[That persons may feel contentment while enjoying all that they can wish, we readily acknowledge. But we have not real contentment, unless we could be contented with any change of circumstances which God might see fit to appoint. Nor indeed can this fruit spring from any thing but real godliness. Therefore the complacency which many take in their own fancied contentment, while they are uninfluenced by vital godliness, is a delusion, which, if not rectified in time, will issue in the most fearful disappointment and misery.]

2. Those who profess godliness, but manifest a worldly or discontented spirit—

[The tree must be judged of by its fruits. In vain are the highest pretensions to Christian experience, if we be not dead to the world, and resigned to the will of God. O brethren, how many professors of godliness have, “through a *desire* to be rich^a, fallen into snares and temptations, and into foolish and hurtful lusts, which have drowned them in destruction and perdition!” Remember, that “the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some have coveted after, they have pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” But thou man of God, flee these things, and seek rather to be “rich towards God.”]

3. Those who profess both godliness and contentment—

[Know, that you have a richer portion than crowns or kingdoms. You never can have occasion to envy any man. Only seek to grow in these divine graces. Give yourselves up wholly to God; and “having food and raiment, be therewith content^b.” Godliness is “durable riches;” and one grain of contentment is worth a talent of gold. Let it appear, beloved, that you live under a full persuasion of these things; and that your ardour in pursuit of heaven is accompanied with a proportionable indifference about the things of time and sense.]

^a βουλόμενοι πλουτεῖν, ver. 9—11.

^b ver. 8.

MMCCXXXVI.

LOVE OF MONEY.

1 Tim. vi. 9, 10. *They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*

THERE is one general sentiment in the world, that riches will contribute greatly to our happiness, and that it is our wisdom to make use of all our time and talents in the acquisition of wealth. But widely different from this was the advice of the Apostle Paul, who tells us, that “having food and raiment, we should be therewith content^a;” and that the very disposition so universally cherished and inculcated in the world, “the love of money,” “is the root of all evil.”

In speaking of the love of money, we will,

I. Contemplate it as a “root”—

Verily, as a root, it is very widely spread and deeply fixed in the heart of man; and richly does it deserve the character given of it in my text. For it is,

1. A base principle—

[There is no intrinsic worth in money, nor any thing that should make it in any respect an object of our regard. The man that possesses most of it has no advantage from it beyond “the beholding it with his eyes^b.” It is well compared to “thick clay” adhering to the feet of a man engaged in a race; and which serves only to impede his way, and to endanger his success^c. How unworthy it is of the affections of a rational and immortal being, may be seen by the contempt poured upon it by our blessed Lord; who, when he came into the world, was born in a stable; and when he lived in the world, “had not a place where to lay his head.”]

2. A vitiating principle—

[There is not a faculty of the soul which the love of money will not debase. It will *pervert the judgment*; so that we shall not be able to see our way, where a disinterested person would find no difficulty whatever — — — It will *blind the conscience*; so that, under its influence, we shall put evil for good, and mistake darkness for light — — — It will also *harden the heart*, and despoil it of all the finer feelings of compassion and love — — —]

3. A domineering principle—

[No better principle can find scope for operation where this prevails. It will swallow up every other, and govern with

^a ver. 8.

^b Eccl. v. 10, 11.

^c Hab. ii. 6.

unbounded sway. In fact, so completely will it occupy the soul, as to make all its faculties subservient to the acquisition of gain — — —]

4. A damning principle—

[I am aware that I speak strongly. But would you have me withhold this awful truth? Would it not be cruelty to you to conceal this, or to soften it, when an inspired Apostle warns you, that this principle “drowns men in destruction and perdition?” Only let it be remembered, that “covetousness is idolatry^d,” and it will be seen at once, that the Apostle’s representation is fully justified — — — Millions upon millions, it is to be feared, are at this very instant bewailing its fatal influence in hell — — —]

In confirmation of this, let us,

II. Examine its fruit—

See what it brings forth,

1. In the world at large—

[What falsehood, in every species of commercial dealing! What injustice, wherever it exists on the side of power! What cruelty, in enforcing claims, and satisfying its demands! Who does not cry out against his neighbour on account either of oppression or fraud? But what shall I say of thefts, and robberies, and murders? Verily, notwithstanding the vigilance of magistrates, and the terror of legal penalties, these things exist to a vast extent. What, then, would the state of the world be, if these restraints were removed? — — —]

2. In the religious world in particular—

[Let but “the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches,” be suffered to grow up in the soul, and they will soon “choke all the good seed that has been sown in it,” and render it unfruitful^e. How many, through its malignant influence, have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows! Unhappy Judas! What “a pillar of salt” art thou! an everlasting monument of the misery entailed by this fatal principle! Ananias, thou hadst better prospects: thou appearedst superior to these base feelings: but thou hadst not gained the victory: and thou thyself didst fall a victim to this accursed lust. And thou, Demas, thou of whom even St. Paul did entertain so high an opinion as repeatedly to rank thee with the Evangelist St. Luke; what became of thee at last, through thy love of money? “Demas hath forsaken us, having loved this present evil world; and is

^d Col. iii. 5.

^e Matt. xiii. 22.

gone to Thessalonica," a trading city, where he may find ample scope for indulging his predominant propensity. And, no doubt, multitudes of professing people, who have not thus openly made shipwreck of their faith, have, by their inordinate anxiety about their worldly interests, destroyed all the comfort of their souls; and, if they have been saved at all, "have been saved only so as by fire^f."

And here let me guard you against a common mistake. When it is said, "They that *will* be rich fall into temptation and a snare," and so on, it is supposed to refer to those only who are *determined to be rich at all events*. But *this* is not the meaning of the passage: the utmost that it means is, "they that *are willing and desirous* to be rich^g:" for the *desire*, harboured in the soul, is amply sufficient to draw after it all the bitter consequences which are here said to result from it. We see this in the rich young man, who turned his back upon the Lord rather than renounce his wealth^h: and St. Peter has associated, what will be ever found inseparable, "*Covetous practices, and cursed children*ⁱ."

Do you ASK, How shall I counteract in my soul this sad propensity? I ANSWER,

1. Think how little the riches of this world can do for you—

[Beyond "food and raiment," what can you possess? Your food may be of a more luxurious kind; but, after a time, you will not enjoy it more than the labourer his homely provision. And your vestments may administer more to pride, but will not really answer the end better than clothing of a coarser texture. Believe it, brethren, the rich have very little, if any, advantage of the poor. Thousands of servants may see clearly enough that they have even a happier lot than their employers: and those who have amassed wealth to ever so great an extent, will, for the most part, be constrained to acknowledge, that they have rather accumulated troubles, than acquired ease. *They are not the happiest who have the largest means of indulgence, but they who have the fewest cares*. Let this be well settled in your minds, and the principle we have been speaking of will be divested of its baneful influence upon your souls.]

2. Think what infinitely better riches are offered you in the Gospel—

[In Christ there are "unsearchable riches;" and all for you, if only you believe in him. Oh! how rich is the soul that

^f 1 Cor. iii. 15.

^h Matt. xix. 22.

^g βουλόμενοι.

ⁱ 2 Pet. ii. 14.

has peace with God! how rich the soul that has all the glory and felicity of heaven! Yet "is it all yours, if ye are Christ's." In your desires after these riches, you cannot be too enlarged. You may "covet as earnestly as you will these gifts:" nor will *this principle* ever operate, but for the production of good; good in yourselves, and good to all around you. Nothing but joy will ever result from this: the fruit of this will be joy in time, and glory in eternity. Get this principle rooted in the soul, and all the riches of this world will be as the dust upon the balance, yea, lighter than vanity itself.]

MMCCXXXVII.

PRACTICAL PIETY ENFORCED.

1 Tim. vi. 11. *Thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.*

NEVER can we lay too great a stress on the practical duties of Christianity, provided we keep them in their proper place, and perform them not for the purpose of making them a justifying righteousness before God, but of evincing the sincerity of our faith in Christ, and the truth of our love to him. The things of this world always stand, as it were, in competition with him; and the carnal man gives to them a decided and habitual preference. It is in vain that men are told how unsatisfying and transient a portion the world is, or what evils the love of it will entail upon us. The ungodly will affect riches as a source of happiness, and will pursue them as their chief good: but the true Christian must not do so: "Thou, O man of God, whoever thou art, thou must flee these things," and "follow after the things which will make for thy eternal peace." There is in this exhortation a peculiarity worthy of our attention: and, that I may present it to you in its just view, I will point out,

I. The duties here inculcated—

They are two: the avoiding of evil, and the cultivating of good. Let us mark,

1. The evils to be avoided—

[An inordinate desire of wealth, and an eager pursuit of it, are unworthy of the Christian character. Contentment is that rather which becomes him: for, in truth, it is but little that a man needs in this world, The richest man in the universe, what has he beyond "food and raiment?" That his food is more delicate, and his raiment more splendid, is of very small importance: the more homely comforts of the poor are as acceptable to them, as the luxuries of the rich to them. Habit soon familiarizes the mind to the situation in which we are placed; and equally reduces the zest with which abundance is enjoyed, and the pain with which penury, if not too oppressive, is sustained. Under a conviction of this, the Christian maintains a holy superiority to the world and all its vanities; and learns, "in whatsoever state he is, therewith to be content^a."]]

2. The graces to be cultivated—

[Here is a chain of graces, no link of which should be broken. "Righteousness" should pre-eminently characterize a child of God. There should be in us no disposition to encroach upon the rights of others; but a firm determination of mind to do unto all men as we, in a change of circumstances, would have them do unto us. But with this must be blended "godliness;" for, if we are to render unto *man* his due, so must we also unto *God*; giving to him *our heart*, and exercising continually those holy affections towards him, which insure the entire affiance of our souls, and the unreserved obedience of our lives. By the term "faith" we may understand either that belief in Christ, which is its general import; or a "fidelity" in executing whatever can be justly expected of us. In both points of view, it is a most important grace: for, in the former sense, it is that which interests us in the Lord Jesus, and in all that he has done, or is doing, for us; and, in the latter sense, it is that whereby alone we can approve the sincerity of our faith and love. To these must "love" also be added: for, what is a Christian without love? Let him know all that man can know, and do all that man can do, and suffer all that man can suffer, and "without love, he is no better than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." Together with these *active* graces, we must possess also such as are *passive*: we must exercise self-government, under all the circumstances that may occur; "possessing our souls in *patience*," under all the trials of life: and "shewing all *meekness* unto all men," however perverse they may be in their spirit, or however they may endeavour to irritate and inflame us. These graces are absolutely indispensable to the Christian character; and whilst

^a Phil. iv. 11

we “flee” the foregoing evils, we must “follow after” these, without exception or intermission.]

But to feel the force of the Apostle’s exhortation in reference to these duties, we must consider,

II. Their mutual influence and relation to each other—

“The love of money” will altogether despoil the soul of these graces—

[Only let self-interest get an ascendant over us, and we shall no longer listen to the claims of *justice*: there will be a bias upon our minds, that will affect, not our actions only, but our very judgment: we shall lean to self in all our decisions; and shall be led to infringe upon the rights of others, almost without a consciousness or suspicion that we are going beyond the bounds of justice and equity.

As for “godliness,” it is impossible that *that* should flourish, where such noxious weeds, as the love of money generates, are suffered to grow. Truly that accursed evil will eat out every thing that is good. It is called “the root of all evil:” and it well deserves that character; for to serve God and Mammon too is absolutely impossible: whichever we adhere to, we must, of necessity, renounce the other.

The graces too of “faith and love,” what scope have they for exercise in a heart imbued with selfishness? Darkness is not more opposed to light, than this evil is to those divine principles: nor can any person under its malignant influence follow, or even discern, the path which those sublime feelings would prescribe.

As for “patience and meekness,” we must not look for them in a mind debased with the love of filthy lucre. Whenever the favourite disposition of the heart is thwarted, impatience will evince itself in no questionable shape, and irritability break forth, both in word and act.

In proof of these assertions, we need only survey the spirit of rival nations, when their interests are thought to clash: or we may look at kindred societies in our own country; or at individuals that are engaged in the same profession; or even at members of the same family, whenever their pecuniary interests have been at stake. I speak not too strongly, if I say, that discord is almost the invariable fruit of conflicting interests; and that, in proportion as the love of money reigns in any bosom, the graces, of which we have spoken, are weakened and dispelled.]

On the other hand, the exercise of these graces in the soul will keep down that hateful lust which we have been contemplating—

[It is manifest that the high principles of righteousness and godliness, of faith and love, of patience and meekness, will give to the soul an elevation above the low, degrading, and debasing feelings of selfishness. They give to the mind a far different cast: they open to it sublimer views; they inspire it with nobler sentiments; they furnish it with a more exalted employment. Suppose an angel to be sojourning on earth; what a contempt would he feel for wealth, and what a pity for all who are fascinated by its allurements! So, in proportion as the grace of God operates in our souls, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," will be held as objects worthy only to be despised and shunned.]

ADDRESS—

1. The man of this world—

[What clearer proof can you have of the vanity of wealth, than by viewing the disorders which the love of it produces through the whole world? Truly, the coveting after money is incompatible with real happiness, and has been the means of piercing the souls of men with many sorrows. Let me, then, entreat you to "flee these things." Flee not only from the inordinate pursuit of wealth, but even from the secret love of it in your hearts. You should have higher objects in view, even the attainment of the Divine image, and the ultimate possession of the heavenly glory. Flee, then, from *those* things, and follow after *these* with your whole hearts.]

2. The true Christian—

[What a name is this by which you are here called—"a man of God!" Doubtless, in the first instance, it designates rather those who are in the office of the ministry: but as all saints are children of God, they may with propriety be addressed by the term that is here used. Consider, then, "thou man of God," what line of conduct befits thy character. Surely thou shouldest be "as a city set on a hill:" thou shouldest be as "a light in a dark world." Oh! see to it that thou "walk worthy of thy high calling," and "worthy also of Him that hath called thee." Let no earthly lusts debase thy soul. Live to God: live for God: live as those who are born from above, and as those "whose treasure is in heaven." Especially cultivate the graces that are here commended to your pursuit; and "let all who see you, acknowledge you as the seed whom the Lord hath blessed."]

MMCCXXXVIII.

THE GOOD FIGHT OF FAITH.

1 Tim. vi. 12. *Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life.*

THE Apostle Paul, being particularly conversant with the cities of Greece, and writing many of his epistles to Churches which he had established in that country, frequently alluded to the games which were there celebrated, taking from them metaphors whereby to illustrate the blessed truths of the Gospel. The public exhibitions of running, wrestling, fighting, formed the chief scenes of amusement to that people: those actions therefore being familiar to their minds, the terms by which they were commonly designated were well calculated to convey to them a full and comprehensive view of the different duties which they were called to perform. Indeed this is the great use of metaphors: they bring to the mind a vast accumulation of ideas under one single term; and serve at once, in a very peculiar manner, to instruct and edify the soul. The exhortation here given to Timothy is of this character. At the games, the prize for which the people contended was held forth to view: in allusion to which, the Apostle says, "Fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life." The words indeed which are here used by St. Paul are not quite so definite as those which are used in our translation. If the English language admitted of it, they would be better translated, "Contend the good contest of faith." The substance of them, however, may be considered by us under these two heads: Maintain the Christian's contest: Secure the Christian's prize.

I. Maintain the Christian's contest—

The life of a Christian is a life of faith—

[The God whom he serves is invisible to mortal eyes; "being one whom no man hath seen, or can see." Nor has

the Saviour, whom he loves, ever been revealed to his organs of sense. It is by faith alone that he apprehends both the Father and the Son; deriving from their love all his motives to action, and from their power all his ability to act. It was thus that St. Paul lived: "The life which I now live in the flesh," says he, "I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me^a." The object too, after which he aspires, is altogether unknown to him as an object of sense: he has never been carried up to heaven, to behold the glory that is there; nor has heaven been brought down to him, that he might know wherein its blessedness consists. But he believes that there is such a place, and that the blessedness of it will be an ample compensation for all that he can do or suffer in the way to it: and therefore "he looks not at the things which are seen and are temporal, but at the things which are unseen and eternal^b." In the whole of his way to heaven, "he walks by faith, and not by sight."]

This life, however, involves him in continual conflicts—

[It is thought, by some, that a life of faith must, of necessity, be very easy, since the person so living has nothing to do but to believe. But it is no easy matter to go contrary to the dictates of sense; and to act, in reference to things invisible, as we would if they were present to our sight. In living by faith, we are withstood continually by those mighty enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil. The world presents to us its temptations on every side, if by any means it may engage us to follow some object of time or sense, and relax our pursuit of those higher objects on which our souls are bent. The flesh too solicits us, and pleads, yea, and strives and fights for indulgence; and, being ever present with us, is at all times ready to betray us into the hands of our enemies, and to bring us into subjection to its unhallowed lusts. And need I say, that Satan, too, is active to destroy us? So inveterate is his enmity, and so powerful his opposition, that all other enemies together are nothing in comparison of him. St. Paul says, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places^c." Who can tell what "devices" that subtle foe puts forth in order to destroy us? His wiles are absolutely innumerable: they are such as nothing but Omniscience can guard us against, and Omnipotence enable us to defeat.]

And these conflicts he must steadily maintain—

^a Gal. ii. 20.

^b 2 Cor. iv. 18.

^c Eph. vi. 12.

[It is “a good fight” which we have to fight: no contest was ever so reasonable as this — — — or so profitable to the soul — — — or so pleasing to Almighty God — — — But remember, no truce is to be made with any one of our enemies: we must contend with them as for our very life. We are “not to fight as one that,” in a fictitious combat and in sport, “beateth the air;” but with all our might; “keeping under our body, and bringing into subjection” every appetite^d; and never resting, till “Satan himself be bruised under our feet^e.”

In maintaining this combat, we must use “faith” as our most effectual means both of assault and defence. No other “shield” have we in comparison of that^f; nor can we find any better weapon, whereby to withstand Satan^g, or subdue the flesh^h, or overcome the worldⁱ.]

To this exhortation the Apostle adds,

II. Secure the Christian’s prize—

Eternal life is that prize which is set before him. The conquerors in the Grecian games had only a corruptible crown for their reward; but the victorious Christian has “a crown of glory, that fadeth not away^k.” Yes, “this is the promise that God has promised us, even eternal life^l.” To this “he is called;” and with nothing short of this should he be content.

Let us, then, ever keep this in view—

[The sight of the prize held out to them, animated, no doubt, the people that were engaged in the various contests. And shall not the hope of eternal life encourage us? What could withstand us, if we kept that steadily in view? What could for a moment fascinate our minds, or what prevail to damp our ardour in the pursuit of it? In vain would the world offer its delights, or menace us with its displeasure: in vain would our corrupt appetites plead for a momentary indulgence, or Satan endeavour to beguile us with any promises whatever. If our eyes were only fixed habitually on the glory of heaven, we should prove as victorious as Moses himself, when “he refused to become the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; and chose to suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin, because he had respect unto the recompence of the reward^m.”

^d 1 Cor. ix. 26, 27.

^g 1 Pet. v. 8, 9.

^k 1 Cor. ix. 25.

^e Rom. xvi. 20.

^h Acts xv. 9.

^l 1 John ii. 25.

^f Eph. vi. 16.

ⁱ 1 John v. 4.

^m Heb. xi. 24—26.

Let us never rest, till we are in actual possession of it—

[We must “lay such hold upon it,” that none shall ever be able to wrest it from us: as our Lord has said, “Hold fast that thou hast, that no man take thy crownⁿ.” “Look that ye lose not the things that ye have wrought, but that ye receive a full reward^o.” It is only “by a patient continuance in well-doing that we can attain to glory and honour and immortality^p.” “If we draw back, God’s soul will have no pleasure in us^q,” nor can we ever be “partakers of Christ in the eternal world, unless we hold fast our confidence in him firm unto the end^r.” In every one of the epistles to the seven Churches of Asia, the final happiness of the saints was suspended on their fighting manfully unto the end, and overcoming all the enemies of their salvation: “Be ye then faithful unto death, and God will give you the crown of life^s.”]

To what is here said, let me ADD,

1. A word of direction—

[“Put on, and keep ever girded upon you, the whole armour of God^t” — — — Yet rely not on any preparation of your own; but “be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might^u.” Go forth, like David, in a simple dependence on your God; and he shall bring your every foe, however formidable, into the dust before you^x. True it is, that you must be good “soldiers of Jesus Christ,” and “quit yourselves like men,” and “war a good warfare.” But “the battle is not yours, but God’s.” “By his own strength shall no man prevail^y,” but “he who trusteth in the Lord shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end.”]

2. A word of encouragement—

[It is no just ground of discouragement to any man, that he is weak: “when he is weak, then is he really strong; because God will perfect his own strength in his weakness.” Nor need any be afraid because they are young. Timothy was but young: yet to him was the exhortation in my text directed. Are any of you fainting by reason of the difficulties which you have to encounter? Think who it is that is engaged in your behalf, even Jesus, “mighty to save.” Think, too, what “a cloud of witnesses” are at this very moment viewing you with the deepest interest, and ready to rejoice in your success. Think, also, what reflections you will have in a

ⁿ Rev. iii. 11.

^o 2 John, ver. 8.

^p Rom. ii. 7.

^q Heb. x. 38.

^r Heb. iii. 14.

^s Rev. ii. 10.

^t Eph. vi. 11.

^u Eph. vi. 10.

^x 1 Sam. xvii. 45—47.

^y 1 Sam. ii. 9.

dying hour; when, in the retrospect of your present conflicts, you will be able to say, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me^z.” Above all, think of the plaudit which in that day you will receive from your Lord and Saviour: “Well done, good and faithful servants; enter ye into the joy of your Lord.” It is but a little longer that you will have to fight. Soon shall you rest from all your conflicts and from all your labours, and enjoy the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.]

^z 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

MMCCXXXIX.

THE TRUE USE OF RICHES.

1 Tim. vi. 17—19. *Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.*

TO inculcate duties, is no less the office of a pious minister, than to establish principles: nor should he shew less zeal in the one than in the other. Our Lord commanded his Apostles to enforce the observance of what men ought to *do*, as well as the reception of what they ought to *believe*^a: and St. Paul, whose zeal was so conspicuous in establishing the doctrines of the Gospel, evinces in every epistle not a whit less zeal to bring men under the influence of its precepts. He even descends to particularize all the duties pertaining to the different relations of life, as of husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, rulers and subjects; and he solemnly enjoined Timothy and Titus to do the same in their respective ministrations. Nay more, he “charged them” to speak on these subjects with all authority^b; and to press them on the attention of every distinct class of hearers, so that each might

^a Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.

^b ver. 13, 14.

fulfil the duties which pertained more immediately to himself. The rich were not in this respect to be overlooked, any more than the poor; nor were they to be addressed with less authority than the poor. Timothy, though quite a young minister, was to consider himself as speaking in the name and with the authority of Almighty God; and was not merely to exhort, but to “charge,” the richest and most powerful of his flock, and most solemnly to enjoin on them a conscientious use of their wealth, for the honour of God, and for the benefit of mankind.

In the charge which Timothy was to give to the rich, we see,

I. The temptations which they are to avoid—

To fix the standard, and to draw an exact line between those who are “rich in this world,” and those who are not, is no easy task: because what would be wealth to a peasant would be poverty to a man whose rank and station in life called for a more enlarged expenditure. But we shall mark the character with sufficient precision, if we say, that the rich in this world are those who possess already, or are able by their different vocations to obtain, what is sufficient for their support in that rank of life wherein Divine Providence has placed them: for all persons so circumstanced have it in their power, by frugality and self-denial, to appropriate a portion of their income to the uses that are here specified.

But to persons so circumstanced many temptations will arise. They will in particular find occasion to guard against,

1. Pride—

[If from any source whatever a man have acquired an increase of wealth, and especially if he have acquired it by his own skill or industry, he immediately conceives himself entitled to a greater measure of respect and honour from all around him. He seems by that circumstance to have attained somewhat of intrinsic worth and excellence; never reflecting, that, as a horse is not a whit better for the trappings with which he is decorated, so neither is a man for the splendour with which he is encompassed. Even good King Hezekiah was led away

with this folly, when the Babylonish ambassadors came to visit him: and the judgments inflicted on him on account of it, sufficiently shew how hateful it is in the sight of God.

Yet, such is the infirmity of human nature, that a man of this description is ready to arrogate also to himself some superior value even before God. He is now no longer to be addressed with all that plainness and fidelity which he admitted when in a lower station. Because “he is full, he is ready to deny the authority of God, and to say, Who is the Lord^c?” or, if he pay attention to the outward observances of religion, he does it, not because they are due from him, but because he thinks it right to set a good example to others; just as if the duties incumbent on *others* did not attach equally to *himself*. A remarkable instance of such folly and impiety may be seen in King Uzziah^d; who, because he had greatly increased in military power, conceived himself authorized to invade the priestly office^e. But all such high thoughts of ourselves are most offensive to God: and therefore we solemnly caution all of you against admitting them into your minds; and “charge the rich in particular, that they be not high-minded.”]

2. Creature-confidence—

[It is exceeding difficult to possess riches, and not to trust in them for some measure of security or happiness; for both of which we ought to trust in God alone. Our Lord intimates this: for, when his Disciples expressed their wonder at that saying of our Lord, “How hardly shall they that *have* riches enter into the kingdom of God!” he immediately explained himself, by saying, “How hardly shall they that *trust in* riches enter into the kingdom of God:” by which he would have them to understand, that very few could possess them without trusting in them^f. “The rich man’s wealth is his strong city,” says Solomon^g: he fancies himself encompassed with that which will protect him from evil, and secure to him the possession of present good. But this is greatly to dishonour God. He has given us all that we possess: he has given it to be enjoyed, yea, and richly to be enjoyed: but he never gave it to be *trusted in*: he never designed that men should rest in the gifts, and forget the Giver; or fix on *senseless vanities* the regards which are due only to “*the living God*.” To them belongs nothing but “uncertainty:” they cannot be depended on for one moment: they may, even whilst we think ourselves most secure of their continuance, “make themselves wings, and fly away.” Or, if they be not removed from us, we may in an instant be removed from

^c Prov. xxx. 9.

^d 2 Kings xx. 12—18. and 2 Chron. xxxii. 25, 26.

^e 2 Chron. xxvi. 16. ^f Mark x. 23, 24. ^g Prov. x. 15.

them by Him who said to the rich man, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee." Let me then guard you all against "making gold your hope, or saying to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence;" for it is a grievous impiety in the sight of God, and "an iniquity to be punished by the judge^h."]

Wealth is given for far other purposes than these; as will be seen, whilst I point out to the possessors of it,

II. The duties they are to perform—

To be dispensed in acts of benevolence is the true use of wealth—

[Nothing is given to us for ourselves alone. As the sun in the firmament possesses not its light and heat for its own aggrandizement, but for the benefit of the whole creation, so all that we possess is for the good of those who lie within the sphere of our influence. It is a talent committed to us by Almighty God, who will call us to an account for the improvement we make of it. He permits us, as we have before said, "richly to enjoy" whatever he has bestowed upon us: but our richest enjoyment of it should be in the exercise of Christian benevolence. We should "do good" with it: we should be "rich in good works;" accounting ourselves rich, not in proportion to what we can amass or spend upon ourselves, but in proportion to the good which we are thereby qualified to dispense, and the benefits which we are enabled by it to confer upon the Church and on the world around us. Nor should our wealth be disposed of in this way "grudgingly, or of necessity;" we should be "ready to distribute, and willing to communicate;" precisely as one member of our body would be to administer to any other that needed its assistance. These are the dispositions which the rich are to cultivate, and these the works in which they are to abound.]

Nor is this less their interest than it is their duty—

[By such acts as these "we lay up in store for ourselves a good foundation against the time to come, and eventually lay hold on eternal life." In hoarding up money, we lay it up *for others* (not by any means knowing who shall actually inherit it): but by dispersing it in acts of piety and beneficence, we store it up *for ourselves*, rendering that "a firm foundation," which was in itself "uncertain;" and that "eternally" permanent, which was in itself confined to "this present world." If the present enjoyment alone were considered, this mode of disposing of it would be our truest wisdom, since there is an infinitely richer zest arising from the exercise of love to God

^h Job xxxi. 24, 25, 28.

and of benevolence to man, than from all the selfish gratifications that wealth can ever purchase. But besides the present satisfaction arising from these sources, there is a full confidence in the soul that God himself will minister to our necessities in the time of needⁱ, and an assured hope of his approbation in the day that he shall judge the world. Not that there is any thing meritorious in works of charity, or that they shall go before us to procure for us an entrance into heaven: but “they will follow us^k” as evidences of our faith and love, and be brought forth before the universe for special approbation and reward. God has pledged himself, that “what we give to the poor he will regard as lent to him, and that he will repay it again^l,” not even a cup of cold water being forgotten, but every the smallest act of kindness being “recompensed at the resurrection of the just^m.”]

Such then being the duty of the rich in relation to their wealth, I come, in conclusion, to address to them a solemn CHARGE respecting it—

Brethren, if I were addressing you as persons ignorant of Christ and of his salvation, I should, notwithstanding I come as an ambassador from God himself, and speak to you in Christ’s stead, be satisfied with the language of entreaty; and should “*beseech* you, in Christ’s stead, to be reconciled to God.” But since ye profess to have believed in Christ, you acknowledge your obligation to fulfil his will: and therefore, instead of beseeching you to make this use of your property, I solemnly *charge* you, or, as the word is elsewhere translated, “*command*” youⁿ, to comply with his injunctions in respect to these things.

1. If you would approve yourselves upright before God, fulfil ye this duty—

[Guard against the snares of wealth. Mark the operation and effect of riches upon your mind. See whether they produce a haughtiness of spirit, or a complacency of mind, as if they could afford you any substantial comfort: and beg of God that you may, to your latest hour, be as lowly as the poorest of men, and as dependent upon your God as are the ravens, which subsist by his providence from day to day. Remember, that God is a jealous God; and that a departure from this line of conduct will subject you to his heavy displeasure^o.

ⁱ Ps. xli. 1—3.

^m Luke xiv. 14.

^k Rev. xiv. 13.

ⁿ 1 Tim. iv. 11.

^l Prov. xix. 17.

^o Mark x. 23, 24.

God in having imparted more liberally to you than to others, has conferred on you the distinguished honour of being his almoners: yea, if I may so speak, of being in his place to your more necessitous fellow-creatures: and by your cheerful execution of your trust he will judge of your love to him: for “if you see your brother have need, and shut up your bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in you?” Be then like the Saviour himself, who “went about doing good:” and let it be the joy of your heart so to minister of your abundance to the poor, that “every ear which hears you may bless you, and every eye that beholds you may bear witness to you^p.” If you be essentially defective in this duty, you are destitute of pure and undefiled religion^q.]

2. If you would be accepted of God in the eternal world, be obedient to this command—

[It is remarkable, that in the account which our Lord has given us of the day of judgment, the discharge or neglect of this duty are the prominent grounds of the sentence that shall be passed on the whole race of mankind. Doubtless there will be many other subjects of inquiry: but still the peculiar stress laid on the offices of love sufficiently prove, that whatever else may be brought forward, these must occupy the most distinguished place^r — — — “Make then to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when ye fail, and go hence, ye may be received into everlasting habitations^s.” “Lay up treasures in heaven, where the bags will never wax old, and where neither rust can corrupt, nor thieves break through to steal^t.” The harvestman scatters, in order to a future harvest: do ye the same: and know, that, “if you sow bountifully, you shall reap bountifully:” but, if you cast your seed with a niggard hand, your harvest will be proportionably small and scanty^u. In a word, if you are rich in this world, endeavour to be “rich towards God^x,” and so act, that God himself may bear this testimony to you in the day of judgment; “He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever; and his horn shall be exalted with honour^y.”]

^p Job xxix. 11—13. ^q Jam. i. 27. ^r Matt. xxv. 34—46.

^s Luke xvi. 9.

^t Luke xii. 33.

^u 2 Cor. ix. 6.

^x Luke xii. 21.

^y Ps. cxii. 9. with 2 Cor. ix. 9.

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